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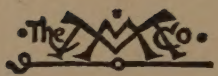
CONFESSIONS OF AN OLD PRIEST



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CONFESSIONS OF AN OLD PRIEST

BY

S. D. McCONNELL, D.D., LL.D., D.C.L.

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Later on,—My creed has melted away, but I believe in good, in the moral order, and in salvation; religion is for me to live and die in God, in complete abandonment to the holy will which is at root of nature and destiny. I believe in the Gospel, the Good News, that is to say, faith in the love of a pardoning "Father."

Amiels Journal.

CONFESSIONS OF AN OLD PRIEST

CHAPTER I

FIFTY YEARS AGO

I HAVE been for fifty years a minister in the church. I entered its ministry with enthusiasm, believing as I did that the church was the one organization in the world of divine institution, that it owes its origin to Jesus Christ, and that he was the unique Son of God. I have been reluctantly forced to ask myself whether any of these things is true.

So far I have been silent and have retained the commission which I accepted in good faith. I have done so for what seemed to me good and valid reasons. In the first place, I wanted to be sure. Fifty years is surely long enough for consideration. Now, having gone over the ground again and again I am sure. But I knew that an open avowal of my convictions would distress many souls, some of them very dear to me. In the second place, situated as I am, I am under no compulsion to teach or preach. I have served my full complement of years and have been honorably retired. When I do preach there is matter aplenty to furnish forth many sermons in the common impulse and motives of men outside all dogma.

Beside that, and for what the consideration may be worth, I am in no way dependent upon the priestly office for my daily bread. I do not need to take my turn in the temple service for sake of a share in the meat of the sacrifice.

So, it is open to me to remain silent and go on performing such ministerial functions as I honorably can, or I can openly avow my convictions and leave it to the Church to do with me as it sees fit. I have decided upon the latter course. But I confess I have done so with the hope that after I have a said all I have to say the Church may decide that I and such as I have a place in her ministry.

An easier and simpler way would be for me to ask for my dismissal and quietly withdraw. The average man would probably pronounce this to be the honorable way. Those who give this judgment would do so from the prevailing notion that office, or even membership, in the church involves something of the nature of a contract. The condition of admission is the public declaration of a belief. To this engagement the church and the individual are parties. Unless the church officially changes its belief the member once admitted has no right to withdraw. If the member loses his belief he forfeits his membership. This is the ground upon which all heresy trials proceed. The question at issue is not of the truth or falsity of the beliefs, but whether or not a contract has been broken. Convinced as I am that the church acts *ultra vires* in making subscription to a creed a condition of office or membership I do not feel morally constrained by a contract the terms of which I have come to believe null and void. I do not need to say more at this point inasmuch as the question must be considered at length later on. I have elected to state my beliefs from within the Ministry and not from outside. What follows is a statement of the grounds upon

which my decision rests. I set forth the steps and stages through which I have come to the place where I stand, the more willingly because I am sure that many another priest has passed through the same phases of faith to its collapse —and has kept silent, as I have done.

I was born and reared, like the first great protagonist of Christianity, "after the most straitest sect a Pharisee," in the Scotch Presbyterian Church. Not only were the basic articles of the creed unquestioned, the Incarnation, the Divinity of Jesus, his supernatural birth, his resurrection, his Ascension and eternal reign in the universe, the Sacraments necessary to salvation, but equally unquestioned the inferential dogmas, even to the literal inspiration of the Bible and the creation of the world in the year 4004 B.C. I know of course that during the fifty years past many dogmas have been abandoned or been silently shelved. Many an orthodox Christian has now only a smile for Jonah and his whale or Eve's too seductive serpent, and is not disturbed by the discovery that the whole historic fabric of the Old Testament is a pious forgery and adaptation at the hands of Ezra and his associates. Indeed they are not unwilling to allow that the whole "Infancy" portion of the Gospels with its virgin birth and accompanying prodigies might be excised without fatal consequences. Many feel a sense of relief at the result of this process of lightening ship. They think that there are two categories of Christian doctrine, one fundamental and essential and the other nonessential, and that they rest upon different and independent foundations. They fancy that any one of a hundred dogmas might be dropped without effect upon those remaining. But they do not consider the fact that since all dogmas rest upon the same authority the infraction of any one of them breaks the binding force of the authority itself.

Whether it be an infallible pope, an infallible general council, or the general agreement of the church the effect is the same. The sanction is equal for all dogmas alike, no more, no less. For a long while I deluded myself forgetting this fact. As I felt the skirting walls of the doctrinal foundation crumbling under my feet, I reassured myself that I could at any time retreat and find myself safe within the walls of the main building. Or I was like the holder of a large and irregular estate, which I had inherited from my fathers. It had never occurred to me to examine the title deeds or to trace its origin. It was enough to know that my forbears had been in quiet possession for centuries. When question was first raised about certain outlying portions of it my first feeling was one of half-amused annoyance. I pointed out how long it had been unchallenged, how every portion of it was necessary to the symmetry of the whole, and chiefly contended that the Overlord from whom the estate had originally come had granted it in just that shape and no other. It was all of no avail. I found that the critics and historians had been searching the titles with the result that at least certain portions of my claims were altogether indefensible. But, like many others, I rested secure, confident that the main body of my holding stood upon a different kind of title.

But can any portion of the accepted "Christian Faith" be rejected without rendering it all insecure? Does the Divinity of Christ, for instance, rest on any different foundation from the Inspiration of the Bible? the dogma of the Trinity from that of a Personal Devil? the Resurrection of Jesus from the speaking with tongues at Pentecost? I had received it all and all alike, as an inheritance and tradition. Was this a valid ground on which to stand? The question reduced itself to, Why am I a Christian?

Of course I might be content with the pragmatic reason that the exalted ideal of life which it presents is so noble and inspiring that it vindicates its truth by its results. But this reply is unsatisfactory for many reasons. In the first place, it may well be questioned whether this ideal has been the product of Christianity, or whether it has been gathered into it from the steady moral evolution and development of the race through the centuries, whether, in a word, the Christian ideal has been a cause or effect. The habit of crediting all the moral gains achieved through the ages to Christianity and debiting unregenerate human nature with all its losses is unwarranted. Moreover, these ideals were in the world in one form or another ages before Jesus was born.

But in any case these ideals are not the *differentia* of Christianity. That is, it is, in its essential quality, something entirely different. Its distinctive quality is not the possession of these ideals, but the sanction which it provides for them. This sanction arises out of a set of alleged concrete facts occurring in time and space. If we were not dulled by familiarity with the claims of Christianity we would be amazed at their mere presentation. They are in substance these,—that about the year 752 A.U.C. a child of a virgin mother was born in a remote district of Asia and was named Jesus. Of the first thirty years of his life nothing is known. At about that age he appeared as a peripatetic rabbi. He claimed to be in an unique fashion the Son of God. He declared that the eternal destiny of every human soul would be determined by whether or not it accepted him at his own valuation. He spoke with a divine authority which allowed no contradiction. He asserted that any one looking on him saw God. He wrought innumerable miracles, curing men by a word of palsy and leprosy, transmuted water into wine, walked dry-

shod on the waves of the sea, restored life to a friend who had been four days dead and buried, was put to death as a disturber of the peace, his body was sealed in a rock-hewn sepulcher, three days later he rose from the dead, a month later he was caught up to heaven in a cloud, and announced that in like manner he would come again to judge the quick and the dead.

The differentia of Christianity is the historical Christ. That aggregate of organization, institutions, doctrines, sacraments, ritual and ethics includes a thousand things besides the above enumerated concrete facts, but without these facts admitted it is not Christianity, and its obligation disappears. Now, it would surely seem that a set of alleged facts upon which such stupendous consequences depend must rest upon a foundation of impregnable evidence. What is the evidence? I do not remember precisely when these questions first awoke and startled me, nor what was the immediate cause. Probably it was due to the *Zeitgeist*. For most people such questions do not arise at all. In the religious, as in every other, sphere of life people accept the beliefs current in the world into which they are born. Propositions which would appear preposterous if presented to one when mangrown are but matters of course and commonplace if he has lived with them from childhood. In this unthinking way the beliefs of Christianity were accepted for many ages. It was not until near the middle of the last century that any widespread uneasiness in their presence began to be felt. Of course there have been in all ages those who doubted or rejected them, but in the ages of faith the doubter is silent or silenced. But all Christian claims are now subject to challenge and examination. Most of this popularizing of criticism has occurred within the fifty years of my ministry. Such new dissolvent influences as Strauss'

"Life of Christ" and Darwin's "Origin of Species" had been doing their work for some time before, and of course I was aware of their existence, but I dismissed them, the one as another blasphemy and the other as an additional instance of "science falsely so called." The fortunes of my profession led me before many years to minister to a congregation composed chiefly of educated and professional men and women. I found that the challenge to traditional belief must be faced. Strauss and his kind really seemed to me blasphemers and Darwin and his ilk grotesque theorists. For twenty years the "warfare of religion and science" raged and I became a not undistinguished champion of the creeds. I exposed the self-destructive character of evolution, denounced the higher criticism, hailed Gladstone as the triumphant victor over Professor Huxley, felt confident that his "Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture" could not be shaken, and that Bishop Ellicott had stopped the mouth of the critics of the Bible.

But when the controversy died down I had the uneasy feeling that though my side was victorious the enemy seemed strangely unconcerned about it all. I felt like one who had been working strenuously to dam back an invading river; the dam was complete and appeared to be adequate, but when finished the river had disappeared from above it and was flowing in around and below. I began to realize that Cardinal Newman had been right when he said, "My quarrel was with liberalism, and by liberalism I mean the anti-dogmatic spirit and its development. It is not now a party, it is the whole educated world."

At this time I chanced to be closely associated with one of the bishops who took a leading part in the prosecution of the great Bishop Colenso for heresy. He was tried, deposed and excommunicated for questioning the arithmeti-

cal accuracy of the number of goats and cattle as reported in the book of Exodus to have followed the Israelites in their forty years wanderings in the wilderness. This deposition was by the practically unanimous vote of the Anglican Episcopate, and with the approval of the Christian world. It seems incredible to me now that I should not have discerned the folly and wickedness of this last great outburst of intolerance and ignorance. Practically all intelligent men, clergy and laity alike, now accept as obvious truth the things for which the Bishop of Natal suffered fifty years ago. And no gesture of even regret has been made by the Episcopate which persecuted him. Since that time new avenues have been opened up in the fields of natural science and critical inquiries of the dogmas and faiths of the world and philosophical explanations of these. Both avenues are thronged by eager crowds, the learned and the unlearned, as well as by people of plain intelligence. Traditional thought, dogma and devotion have been brought down from their inaccessible constellations in the firmament on high into the rationalized arena of earth. "Men no longer oppose Christianity, they explain it."

CHAPTER II

OBSTINATE QUESTIONINGS

As soon as I had fairly realized the situation I ceased to teach and preach as the advocate of the creeds and confined myself to "righteousness, temperance and judgment to come." Meanwhile the question haunted me, Is Christianity true after all? I mean true, not as a definite and coherent body of propositions, but will the alleged facts on which it rests stand up under a fearless and candid examination? I determined that I must undertake such an examination, and I do not think I underrated the magnitude and difficulty of the undertaking. What we call Christianity is so stupendous a thing that no matter what one's temper may be he cannot approach it lightly. It is a history of twenty centuries of devotion, an organization embracing more members than any secular empire, a literature probably as voluminous as all other literatures together, a body of rites and ceremonies hallowed by tradition, and around which gather the hopes, the memories, the affections of countless myriads. Apostles, warriors, scholars, missionaries, and plain folk have lived for it and died for it. In the face of all this how could it be otherwise than true? If it be not true, how to account for its existence? If it be not founded on miracle, is it not then the outstanding miracle? This last consideration held me at bay. But in the end another overrode it,—though it be true for all the world it avails nothing, it must be true for me.

At this point my devout friend the Mystic spoke to me and said, "You can find sufficient witness of its truth within you if you will. Only open your soul expectantly and you may hear the whisper of Jesus bearing consistent witness with your own spirit of the truth as it is in him. Then you will join that countless and blessed company in all ages who need no further argument or evidence."

To this I could only reply that this kind of testimony availed nothing to my need. In the first place, it is a kind of experience in no wise confined to the religion of Christ. It is as old as the ages, and common to all religions. The nympholept and the enthusiast are always sure of their possession. It is possible for certain persons everywhere to shut out thought and sound of the world and hear voices and see visions. I would not deny or belittle these religious experiences, but I know enough of human psychology to understand how valueless they are as evidence of objective realities. And what was more important for me was the fact that in the earnest longing to hold fast the faith which was mine I had tried to find this same experimental proof, had sought it with prayers and tears. But I could not attain to it. In the very nature of the case this kind of evidence is sufficient only for him to whom it comes. It is not transferable. One may sincerely envy it, as a tone-deaf man may envy his friend's delight in music. He does not question the reality of the music, but the reality must be shown him by other means. And here I may say that the open and blatant exposure of these experiences, especially in hymns and public worship, now offend me as much as they once discouraged me. In a word, religion as an emotion and religion as an organized system of history and doctrine belong in different spheres. The attempt so commonly made to carry over

the experiences in the one realm and use them as evidence in the other is futile when it is not dishonest.

The situation of one who has been reared within a religion is very different from that of one who may be supposed to confront it for the first time and be asked his assent, an intelligent Japanese for instance. The latter simply asks, "What is it? What is the evidence for it?" It is objective and he is detached. But with the former it is far otherwise. All his associations, his affections, his memories, his habits of thought are entangled with it. It has become part of himself. The invasion of doubt causes a schism in his own personality. Determined as he may be to find the truth and to follow it where it may lead, it is far harder for him to disbelieve than to believe. To be honest with himself he must do violence to himself. He is therefore doubly exposed to the solicitations of his emotions. At any rate, this "inner witness" which the mystic commended to me refused to speak to me. A hundred times I have watched with envious eyes the Salvation Army lads and lasses. They are sure. They know. Their simple souls keep step with their clanging cymbals and exultant drum. Once long ago I walked weary miles to a camp meeting in the hope that by placing myself in the midst of revivalistic heat what I thought to be the recalcitrant crust of my soul might be melted. I knelt, watched, waited, and prayed. But nothing happened. Never was a soul more earnest in its longing for spiritual testimony. Despondent and discouraged, I plodded home, saying to myself that there must be in me some strange congenital defect, that as some unfortunate men are born tone-deaf or color-blind, some similar lack must be in my spiritual make-up. But in the end I came to see that the thing which inhibited me was the fact that I could not deceive myself. It was my understanding

which demanded satisfaction and refused to accept it at the hands of my emotions. Though the people of a whole continent should march in triumphal procession proclaiming themselves to have the witness of the spirit, what bearing would it have upon the question of fact as to whether Jesus walked upon the water, or raised Lazarus from the dead, or rose from the dead himself? The attempt to establish an alleged fact by a spiritual experience is as futile as to solve a problem in geometry by a concerto on the violin. The mystic has always been worse than useless as an apologist. He belongs to an innumerable company in all ages and in all religions. The omphaloi who sit gazing at their navels, see visions, the medicine man who chants his incantations till he falls down in an ecstasy, the Quaker with his inward voices, the convert in the midst of revival frenzy, Paul when he could not tell whether he was in the body or out of the body, the Salvation Army soldiers with shining faces shouting hallelujahs, all these and all alike have their place in phenomena which are real and deserve fitting study, but they cannot touch the objective truth of the religion of Paul or Buddha or Manitou or Mithra or Christ.

Nevertheless, when I considered the stupendous magnitude of Christianity, its millions on millions of adherents, its material fabric of churches, cathedrals, hospitals, and schools, its literature like the leaves of the forest, its activities multiform and world-wide, the superior intelligence of its followers, I asked myself, Is it conceivable that it could thus exist if its foundations were not made of impregnable fact? If it does not rest upon miracle, it is itself the supreme miracle. This short and easy answer has silenced many a questioning mind. For a long time it appeared to me not satisfying but insuperable. Tennyson in the tragedy makes Cranmer cry out, "What am I, Cranmer, against the ages?"

CHAPTER III

WHO WAS JESUS?

It must be always borne in mind that the mighty and complicated structure which we call Christianity does rest upon the Creeds. The continued existence of its fabric has been and is due to the stubborn steadfastness of orthodoxy. There be many who please themselves with the fancy that the catholic Creeds only represent the insubstantial speculations of a long forgotten age, that they may be more or less respectfully laid away while the "substance" of Christianity will remain. But though this substance of which they speak may well be the religion of Jesus, it is not Christianity. No; the catholic instinct of orthodoxy has been a true one; it is the instinct of self-preservation. The alleged facts are the foundation upon which it is founded; —that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of a virgin, died and was buried and rose again and ascended into heaven from whence he rules the universe. If these be not factual realities belief in the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Judgment by the Son of Man are but silly imaginings. When I first began to be uneasy in the presence of these dogmas, when I began to realize that they were out of all relation to intellectual integrity, to ethical values, to the facts of human experience, I consoled myself with the thought that they were illegitimate conclusions from the accepted life and teachings of Christ. Farther reflection convinced me that if the Jesus of the New Testa-

ment was, and did and said the things he is represented to have done the dogmatic conclusions are not only legitimate but inevitable. They are the only interpretations possible of such a life. No phenomena in the whole history of the race or conceivable by the mind of man can equal these facts if they be facts. They transcend all events, all discoveries. We are dulled to their significance by their constant iteration. Is it a fact that in the whole history of the race one man child and one only named Jesus was born of a virgin mother? Did he speak words of such supernal knowledge as would be impossible for any man? Did he by a word heal lepers, restore palsied limbs, give sight to those born blind? Did he raise dead men from the grave? Did he rise again from the tomb himself? Did he? Unless these be veritable occurrences, in the same sense as the assassination of Julius Cæsar, the overwhelming of Pompeii or the conquests of Alexander, the sanction and obligation of Christianity disappears. If, on the other hand, they be real historical events, then all the claims and conclusions of theological dogma and all the statements of the Creeds are too little rather than too much. In that case, exaggeration is impossible. If the facts are so the *Trisagion* and *Te Deum* are all too feeble. But devotion and worship must wait in silence until the question of fact is determined. Surely phenomena of such transcendent import demand commensurate evidence. Just what is the evidence for the statements concerning Jesus Christ contained in the Creeds?

To answer the question, I set about a fresh study of the life of Christ. The task looked simple and easy. I had only to approach it with the aid of those modern scholars who had devoted their lives to it. The bulky volumes of Strauss and Renan and Keim, Edersheim and

Farrar, as well as a score of others were at my service. Some were critical, some devotional, some fanciful, but surely among them all no scrap of evidence could remain ungathered and unexamined. I was amazed to find how few facts there were of the kind I needed. The "Lives" were swollen with more or less reliable history and descriptions of the times, of oriental manners and customs, of Jewish theology and tradition, of attempts to harmonize the Gospels, together with a mountainous mass of questionable sentimentality, but of material for a biography I found almost nothing. This forced me to ask, Just what do we really know about Jesus?

Of his actual life we know very little. When we seek information about any personality in the past we first of all inquire of his contemporaries. In this way we learn what we know about Socrates or Cæsar, or Constantine or Mahomet. It is a surprise and a disappointment, therefore, when we realize that for Jesus there is no contemporary witness whatever. Few periods in the past are so well known as the time of Augustus and Tiberius. Its literature is abundant above that of any other epoch. But the name of Jesus is not to be found in it. No contemporary writer knows of his existence. Later on, a spurious passage in Josephus, a questionable reference by Suetonius, and the mention by Tacitus of a name which may be his,—and that is all.

The first time his name appears in any surviving writing is in a letter written about A.D. 50 by a Jew named Saul to a little group of followers whom he had collected some years earlier in Thessaly. These had not yet begun to call themselves Christians. Among all the names mentioned in the New Testament as apostles, friends or enemies, in the entourage of Jesus, only two give a vivid impression of living, concrete persons, Paul and Pontius

Pilate. The others are more or less shadowy, remote, intangible. But when Paul is called upon as a witness to the facts in the life of Jesus he proves anything but satisfactory. He does know something of the life, but apparently not much, and what is more strange he seems to attach little importance to it. He says that his knowledge concerning him did not come from men or by men but through "revelation." The "Christ" with which he is concerned is a transcendental being, to some extent, indeed, associated with Jesus, but in a way difficult to determine. When I looked for a qualified witness to the mighty works of Jesus I found Paul unavailable. He never alludes to them. He is apparently unaware of the wonderful words. He never quotes them but once, and then in a saying which is not found elsewhere in the New Testament. He never used the dicta of Jesus to enforce duty or as an authority for belief. He depends upon reasons and arguments in places where it would have been far more easy and more conclusive to appeal to the words of the Master. He knows nothing of the Beatitudes or of the Sermon on the Mount. The ethic which he habitually urges is pitched in quite a different key. It is not of the resist-not-evil, blessed-are-the-poor, love-your-enemies type. It is the plain universal morality of human experience,—be diligent in business; honor the king; husbands, love your wives; children, obey your parents; pay your debts; if a man will not work neither shall he eat. The transcendental morality accredited to Jesus seems to be unknown to him.

I turned away, therefore, from the Epistles disappointed. Thus the nearest approach to contemporary testimony failed me. I turned to the Gospels. All my life, like other people, I had thought of them as veritable biographies, or at any rate four separate biographies, each the complement of the others and all true. But I began to

realize that although I had read them and studied them and knew them literally by heart I had never asked myself what they really were and what were their place and function in Christianity. Now that I was determined to get to the bottom of the facts and to the bottom of my belief, I said to myself: here is the record and the only record of the life of Jesus, what is its historical value?

The authors are unknown, therefore their characters could not be called upon to support the intrinsic credibility of the story. Moreover, they were written from fifty to a hundred years after the death of the subject of the biography. What authorities they used is unknown. Thus it was plain that the only way to estimate their truth was to weigh the verisimilitude of the story. I do not spend time to consider the figment of "inspiration" to reveal truth to them or to preserve them from mistake. It is too late in the day for such trifling. Sincerely trying to put aside all preconception, I opened the earliest of them, the Gospel of Mark. But I was arrested and brought to a standstill at the first page. I was there confronted with the story of an amazing miracle. This brought up into my consciousness with a shock that I had ceased to believe in the possibility of miracles. I did accept them once as a matter of course; I do not believe them now. I closed the book and cast back in my mind to discover when and why I had lost the belief. I could not tell. The *Zeitgeist* had molded me unconsciously. But I found myself convinced that miracles were not only intellectually incredible but that the belief in them was ethically debauching. But although I cannot tell when my belief in them faded and disappeared, it seems necessary for the purpose before me to set down the reasons why I reject them. It is not possible to arrange one's beliefs in the

chronological order of their arrival. It often happens that a process which has been going on long in one's subconsciousness unsuspected is the real origin of convictions which he fancies he has reached by logical means.

CHAPTER IV

THE ETHICS OF MIRACLES

Christianity moves in an atmosphere of miracles and prodigies. It has linked its fortunes with the Bible, and the Bible is a catalogue of miracles. Their actuality is assumed by every writer. They range in importance from causing an iron axhead to swim, to raising Lazarus from the dead. For a generation or more multitudes of Christian people have been increasingly uneasy in their presence. They had been taught that it was a religious duty to believe them. They are unwilling to lay this obligation on their children. Shall they tell them "Bible stories" as fairy tales? Or shall they tell them as veritable occurrences, with the risk of the children's resenting having been deceived? One large class of them is got rid of by the assumption that they were only natural occurrences which from one circumstance or another seemed marvelous to the spectators, that these quite naturally referred them to the presence of supernal power, and that legendary accretions gathered in time around the story. Others, especially those of healing, are relieved by pointing out the well-known interaction of mind and body, and the observed power of suggestion. But this minimizing process is a dangerous one. Those who adopt it are likely to lose their candor and intellectual honesty. When successful, the result is worse than useless. The only religious value the prodigies can have is their value *qua*

miracle. If this quality be eliminated they become not worth contending about. It is futile to insist that they have a necessary place in religion and at the same time are not in any real sense miracles at all.

But after all is said, there remain the accounts of occurrences about which there is no possible ambiguity. Either they occurred or the Scripture record is not true. When this situation is realized by one who has lived in the inherited faith it causes keen distress. He has been taught to look upon miracles as of the very fabric of the system and the ultimate proof of its truth, for "no man could do these mighty works unless God be with him." To pick and choose among them is only trifling. Is the principle of the miraculous to be accepted at all, or is it to be rejected altogether? And in either case why? One must have some solid ground to stand upon.

At this point it is apt to be assumed that it is all a matter of evidence. One is reminded of Huxley's declaration that he was not prepared to deny the possibility of miracles, that he only waited for adequate proof in any specific case. I am not much affected by this logic-chopping about their possibility or their probability. No doubt Hume was right: no amount or kind of evidence can establish the fact of a miracle. The reason is simple; evidence itself is a process which can only function within the regular course of nature. It is orderly and has its fixed laws of procedure. Therefore it cannot deal at all with a phenomenon which is by definition outside the natural order. A thing to be proved must lie in the same realm as the process of proof. Evidence, therefore, can have nothing to say about a miracle, for or against.

I believe the record to be incredible in the strictest meaning of the word. I have become convinced that miracles do not happen, never have happened, and ought

not to happen. The ground of my conviction is my idea of God. To take an instance,—the twelfth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles tells the story of Peter being delivered from prison by the miraculous interposition of an angel,—

"When Herod was about to bring him forth Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with chains, and guards before the door of the prison. And behold an angel of the Lord stood by him and smote Peter on the side, saying, Arise up quickly. And the chains fell from his hands, and the angel said, follow me."

Now this is an occurrence which must be pronounced miraculous, however widely the connotation of the term be extended. Moreover, it is a typical one in that it assumes the immediate interposition of supernatural power in the interest of religion. It possesses all the differentia of a miracle. Having been delivered Peter proceeded to the house where the other disciples were at prayer for his release, and was received with thanksgiving when he told his story. Then,—

"When Herod had sought for him and found him not he examined the guard and commanded that they should be put to death."

It appears, therefore, that the miracle by which Peter and the church profited was secured at the cost of the lives of a dozen innocent soldiers who had never heard the name of Peter or his Master. There is the story, do I believe it? I do not. But again, why? I answer, not because it is "impossible," or inconceivable, or because evidence for its verity might not be produced to beat

down my reluctance. For none of these reasons, but because my idea of God makes it impossible to believe that he would act so. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" I cannot believe in a God who confers favors in forgetfulness of their consequences.

The miraculous has been rejected on the ground that it puts to confusion the idea of natural law. Every one now realizes, for example, that for the sun to stand still at Joshua's prayer would cause confusion and wreck throughout the universe, beyond where old Bootes leads his leash or Sagitarius draws his bow in the south. That might be of small matter. If omnipotence could cause physical disorder omnipotence might restore it again. But a violation of the eternal ethics would be beyond the resources of omnipotence to mend. In the case of Peter's deliverance the cost of the divine interference had to be paid by those who had no benefit from it. Could the disciples who welcomed his return with thanksgiving have done so if they had in mind the poor guards under the executioner's ax? This obliviousness of the consequences of the miracle is characteristic. In the Old Testament it may be said to be the rule. The servants of Jahveh are rescued, protected, prospered, regardless of how many Egyptian mothers have to mourn for their firstborn, how many babes of Egypt die, how many Edomites perish, how many foolish children are devoured by Elisha's shebears, how many women and children were crushed under the falling walls of Jericho. These old stories do not disturb us much because we do not care much. We understand now that the peoples at the stage of moral development where they then were could well conceive of God as acting so. We disregard the moral obtuseness of the annalist for sake of the ideals of the prophet. But we ourselves conceive God to be bound by moral considerations. No

soft favoritism for a "chosen people" could make him forget his other children. The Father-God whom the intelligent world has come to revere is not the arbitrary despot, killing and making alive, all to his own glory.

To an extent the stories of miracles in the New Testament are free from this taint of moral obtuseness, but the principle which must control in consideration of them is plain. That is, the interposition of God in the natural order of things, at the solicitation of any man or men, must of necessity involve wrong and inequity to other men. If this principle be valid all stories of miracles must be set aside. The record, however venerable and sacrosanct, must be rejected in the interest of the supreme moral necessity to believe that God is good. One is reluctant to credit anything less than truth to the narrative of events in the Scriptures. There is no need to credit anything less than sincerity. The writers said the things they believed to be true. Upon what seeming evidence they accepted them as facts can never be known. They are remote in time and space, and the stories come to us through many hands. The attempt to weigh and examine the evidence would be futile. There is another, shorter, and more available way.

As an example, we may select the story of the miraculous draught of fishes. A fleet of fishing boats is at work on the sea of Galilee. They are fishing for the market at Bethsaida. The livelihood of the fishermen and their families depends on their catch. They toil all night and take nothing. But in the early morning two or three of them are favored,—is not favored the word?—by divine interposition and their nets are filled and boats loaded. But what of the other boats and men of the fleet? Had they ground to feel themselves unfairly dealt with by the Lord of men and fishes? Of course if it

should appear in this case or any other that the purpose was "to show forth God," the favoritism to particular men would be of small consequence. But this quality cannot be allowed to the Gospel miracles. Jesus himself, according to the account, again and again disavows and deprecates it. He rejects or at least belittles the faith which comes from "seeing many mighty works." In only one case, that of the man born blind, does he connect God's manifestation with the prodigy, and that only incidentally.

Now, if it be admitted, as it is by practically all modern apologists, that the *raison d'être* of miracles is not evidential, i.e., to show God to men who would not otherwise discern him, a difficulty arises which the apologist has not reckoned with. In that case the miracle becomes the result of caprice or accident. Those who benefited by them did so only because they happened to be in the way at the time. One blind beggar happens to be sitting by the wayside at the moment when Jesus is passing by, and is healed. Another equally deserving—if desert has any meaning in the case—sitting round the corner misses his opportunity. One weeping widow has her dead brought back to life because the funeral cortège chances to meet Jesus in the street. If the widow of Nain has her son restored to stanch her tears why should not the same compassionate and all-powerful word do as much for all weeping mothers in Judea and in the world? And so of all the rest,—the *one* man with the withered hand, the *one* tormented woman, the *one* paralytic—is it enough that these were healed only because they were fortunate to happen in the way? Does God's omnipotent and ever-present compassion function only when accident or chance makes a way for it? Is He not the Lord of Chance also? Here we reach the root of the matter. If miraculous inter-

ventions be admitted they introduce an element of incertitude, which would put all life to confusion. In so far as they may be secured at the instance or petition of certain persons they admit a partiality of which all others may complain. In the great school of life the Master will not set aside the rules at the importunity of any favorite. The whole ethical value of the school is dependent upon the truth: "he knows no variableness nor shadow of turning."

What then about Prayer? This principle is indeed fatal to the vulgar and primitive notion concerning it. The familiar exhortation to be instant in prayer in the expectation that the petitions will be granted because of much speaking forgets that granting the requests would in so far forth import uncertainty to the lives of all men, including the petitioners. No pupil may expect favors of the Master. If any one can do so successfully all the others may rightly complain. If all may do so at will the rules of the school become nonexistent. The more the Master is loved and trusted the less inclination will there be to ask exceptions. It is significant that, for example, the prayers for rain or for fair weather or for deliverance from pestilence have largely fallen into disuse. Even prayer for victory in war is proffered in a hesitating and deprecatory spirit. Some will say that these have fallen into desuetude not because men have experienced their futility but because of a general decline of the religious spirit. No; it is due to a deepening sense of their worthlessness. Men pray as much as they ever did. They will always pray. But their prayers tend to become more and more communion and less and less petition. It is the doubt whether miracles would be good for men to-day which causes the doubt that they occurred in other days. It is not so much the modern sense of "the reign of law"

which dissolves away belief. "Nature" is an abstraction and her so-called "laws" may be left to take care of themselves. But the moral distinction of right and wrong can only survive in a universe in which moral personalities are assured that a personal God will always act with uniformity and impartiality.

In his story of "Lourdes," Zola thus speculates upon the consequences of the supreme miracle in the Gospel record:

"One fancies Lazarus when led from the tomb, saying to Jesus: Master, why have you awakened me to this abominable life? I slept so well; I tasted at last so good a repose. I had known all life's miseries, its dolors, its defeats, its madness. I had paid to suffering the frightful debt of living. Now you compel me to pay double, making me to recommence my sentence. Have I then committed some inexpiable fault that you punish me with a so cruel chastisement? To go through like again! To feel myself dying again day by day! And it was ended. I had passed through the terrifying gate of death, that moment the thought of which empoisons existence. This anguish you wish me to endure a second time. You wish me to die twice that my misery may be beyond that of all other men. Oh, Lord! let it be soon. I beg you do another great miracle; lay me to sleep again in such wise that the sweet repose may not be broken again."

CHAPTER V

THE JESUS OF THE GOSPELS

Now, believing what I have written above to be true, is it worth while to read any farther than the first page of the Gospel where the alleged prodigy arrested me? I did read on. I read again and again, trying to do so as though I had never seen it before. I was driven to the conviction that, setting the miraculous element aside, the story was in many regards incredible on account of its contradictions and discrepancies. No "Harmony" of the Gospels is possible without such violence to the text as would not be tolerated in the case of any other writers. The chronology, the sequence of events, the reasons and occasions assigned for the various incidents, the iteration that "thus it came to pass in order that Scripture might be fulfilled"—these and other considerations render the story valueless as history or biography.

But it does leave on the mind of the reader, whether he be willing or unwilling, the impression of reality. Here are unquestionably *memorabilia* of a remarkable Personality. I had always taken for granted also that here was the account of the origin of Christianity, that this Person was of such compelling authority that he was recognized by those who could see as something different from the sons of men, and that this power, grace and majesty sufficiently explained the origin and growth of the church. But inasmuch as I had become convinced by other reasons

that this origin and growth had a different explanation I was free to evaluate independently this Personality. What this other account of the beginnings of Christianity is will be considered later; indeed its consideration is the main purpose of this writing. Heretofore I had hesitated before making a cool estimate of Jesus' character as he is portrayed in the Gospels by the fear of facing the old dilemma, *aut Deus aut non bonus,* either he must be God or not a good man. But I had come to see the illegitimacy of this alternative. There are a thousand things possible between a God and a scoundrel. I felt free to ask again, Who and what was this man Jesus?

Here I should say that for the purpose of this inquiry I disregard entirely the Fourth Gospel. It is so evidently a work of theological fiction and so hopelessly incompatible with the Synoptic Gospels that it cannot be legitimately used in the attempt to discover historical values. I do not think that the much-mooted question of its date is of much consequence. It may be as late as the middle of the second century, or it may be the earliest of all the Gospels. There is a good deal of reason to think the latter is the case. But being, as it is, a *tour de force* to identify the Alexandrian "Logos" with the "Messiah" of the Jews in the person of Jesus, it is out of all relation to history. If the words which it puts in the mouth of Jesus had been really spoken by him one would indeed have to face the dilemma, *aut deus aut non bonus.*

Bearing in mind that they are by unknown authors, written not less than fifty years after the death of the subject of the memories, not based on any known written authority but on floating verbal tradition, the task is to gather from the Gospels some distinct and coherent presentment of their Subject. I recalled a paragraph of Professor Huxley's which I had read long before. At that

time it had repelled and offended me. But in the intervening years I had moved far from my early preconceptions. Now his words served very well to express my feeling in presence of the baffling problem.

"There was something there, something which if I could win assurance about it, might be one to mark an epoch in the history of the earth. But study as I might certainty eluded my grasp. Thus it has been with my efforts to define the figure of Jesus as it lay in the primary strata of Christian literature.

Is he the kind and peaceful Christ depicted in the Catacombs? Or is he the stern judge who frowns above the altar of SS. Cosmas and Damianus? Or can he be rightly represented by the bleeding ascetic broken by physical pain? Are we to accept the Jesus of the second or the fourth Gospel? What did he really say and do? How much that is attributed to him in speech and action is the embroidery of his followers?"

Of his actual life we know at best very little. A column of a modern newspaper would contain all the record we have. No story of a life has ever been so lovingly and laboriously studied as his has been, but all the fact it yields up is amazingly little. In a contemporary "Men of the Times," if his name had appeared at all, it would have been compiled something like this:

"A Hebrew reformer, born at Bethlehem or Nazareth in Judea. Preached and taught one to three years. Gathered a small company of adherents. Was antagonized by the Jewish authorities who procured his arrest on the charge of sedition. Was crucified under Pontius Pilate the Procurator. His followers claimed that he had risen from the dead."

Surely a meager foundation of fact from which to construct a biography. There have survived, however, a

considerable collection of sayings and teachings attributed to him. These are fragmentary and inconsecutive, chiefly in the form of aphorisms, parables and mystical utterances. They possess rare beauty and also, as we may believe, a rare insight into the nature and disposition of God. As to just what he conceived himself to be and by what authority he spoke and acted it is impossible to determine. His Jewish kin had for many years held an ideal of a strange character which they called the "Messiah," the anointed one. Precisely what they conceived this character to be and what rôle to play cannot be stated with anything like definiteness. But essentially he was to be a personality with a power and dignity beyond ordinary man. He was to put himself at the head of the Jewish people, lead them out of political bondage, reestablish the theocratic commonwealth and make his new "kingdom" the nucleus of a kingdom of righteousness in which the Hebrew people would hold the hegemony. Jesus neither claimed nor disclaimed this rôle for himself. His attitude toward it is ambiguous and perplexing. Whether he half believed it and half doubted, whether he believed it to be true but inexpedient to avow, or whether he believed himself to be the true Messiah but knew that the title did not imply what his followers thought is quite impossible to determine from the Gospels. When he was directly challenged to say by what authority he spoke and acted with such confidence he was obliged apparently to ask himself the same question. But his reply to the challenge was ambiguous. From the Synoptic Gospels it cannot be said certainly whether or not he claimed for himself a nature different from other men. But nothing can be more certain than that the personality sketched in the first three Gospels could never have won the world. The divine music which he chanted was in too unnatural

a key for ordinary human compass. Even the multitude which followed him for a little while in the heyday of his popularity "went backward and walked no more with him." Even the choice band of the Twelve were only bound to him by the charm of his winning presence. They loved him, but their simple souls were perplexed and irritated by his exalted speech. They loved him but never understood him, nor is it clear that he understood himself. At times he upbraided them for their blindness and slowness of heart. At times he pleased himself by mystifying them by paradoxes. In general, he treated them as a great soul always does those he loves, allowing them to understand what they can, prizing their love and faith more than their intelligence. To all appearance his life was a pathetic failure. He had mourned and men would not weep, piped and they would not dance to his music. Fifty miles from where he lived and died his name had never been heard. During his brief career as a rabbi a considerable number had been attracted to him, but when all was done not a single human being had adopted his "way." I asked myself, therefore, How comes it that this obscure person, living his life in an obscure corner of the world, has for ages engrossed the interest of the world beyond all other men?—this man who wrote no book, founded no institution, made no discovery, fought no battle, did not a single one of the things which make men famous. The orthodox answer does not satisfy—"he was divine and men saw God in him." But his contemporaries did not see God in him. A few of his countrymen saw in him "Elijah" or "that prophet" or the "messiah," but even they turned away disappointed and chagrined when they saw him die.

For a time I was disposed, as many have been of late, to question whether there had really been any actual per-

son at all behind the traditionary words and wonders. Was Jesus a real person at all? Or was he but the fictitious figure around which gathered the ideas and hopes of a world seething as it probably has never done before or since with religious longings? Was he the King Arthur of the world's religious round table? As Legge has said, "there has probably been no time in the history of mankind when all classes were so given up to thoughts of religion or when they strained so fervently after high ethical ideals." Was it not possible that out of this universal ferment there had been fashioned a Character to fit the longings?—and which later on took a local habitation and a name? This has been maintained by not a few competent and sober-minded scholars, and all the more confidently by those who have made the most thorough study of the times and the Gospels. Why is not a mythical Jesus as possible as a mythical Buddha or a mythical Abraham or Moses? But this did not satisfy me. There is here a verisimilitude which fiction could not produce. These are surely the *memorabilia* of a real, living man. But what kind of a man?

CHAPTER VI

WHAT KIND OF A MAN

I LEAVE aside the pseudo-concept of an "incarnation." With such a character history could not deal at all. Such a being would be out of all relation to time and space and thought. The simple question is, How is one to estimate and appraise the person presented in the Gospels? Was he good above all other men? Was he wise above the capacity of man? Was his life admirable and worthy of imitation? Did he make the claims for himself which the Gospels state? If he did so was he justified by the facts? Or was he the subject of a delusion of a like kind to which other men are subject? When these questions forced themselves upon me I was shocked as though I had been challenged to examine the virtue of my mother or the honor of my father. But having arisen, they must be faced and laid to rest.

First, as to his wisdom. To the great treasury of human knowledge it cannot be said that he added anything. In science, literature, government, economics he seems to have been upon the same level as the average uneducated man of his time. He uncovered no secret of nature. He gave no counsel as to the right ordering of human affairs. He passed by unregarded the moral, social, and economic evils of his time. He offers no cure or readjustment.

Was he good?—that is, would his life as we have its

record in the Gospels serve as a perfect model and ensample for the lives of all men? Here the distinction between an example and an ideal must be kept in mind. The ideal of life which bears his name is the sum of all the excellence as yet achieved by man. But as an example, to copy, his manner of life will not serve. It does not furnish the material. He had no experience of the multiform relations in which every human life must be spent. The parent, the citizen, the father, the soldier, the man of business, the craftsman find nothing in the actual conduct of his life either to copy or avoid. He lived aloof from the actual world. He had nowhere to lay his head, nor wanted any. When any concrete problem pressed him closely he evaded it, as when asked for his opinion about paying taxes to the heathen Emperor. That his personality was gracious and engaging beyond that of ordinary men appears on every page. But it was equally repellent. Nor can it be said that he attracted the good alone and repelled the bad. Among his most strenuous opponents were many as good as those who became his disciples. Indeed it generally appears that those whom he offended were those whose goodness was intelligent and well ordered, while he drew to him those whose goodness was emotional and instinctive.

His own life was controlled by two profound convictions: first, that God is in very deed a loving Father to all men who are literally his children, that this is to be confidently believed and acted upon. He himself did so without reservation. Second, that all men being brothers must bear themselves with that affection which belongs to brotherhood, that this love must control one's actions without regard to good or evil deserving or to good or evil return. As an illustration he points to the lilies of the field and the fowls of the air and says, "Take no

thought for the morrow, what ye shall eat or wherewithal ye shall be clothed, for your Father in heaven knoweth that ye have need of these things." He points to the crowd and says, "Resist not evil; love your enemies; bless them that curse you." These convictions of his may or may not be Christianity, but they were the religion of Jesus. He lived by them and perished on account of them. Though they may now be evaded as being "counsels of perfection," to him they were the working rule of his life. Now the question pressed upon me, Do these *dicta* represent ideals which may safely be adopted and acted upon? Can I, as a preacher, honestly urge men to try to put them to the test of practice? I could not. Nor was I ready, as is the custom, to gloss them over, dilute them, or destroy their plain meaning by interpretations. God may be good, loving, full of compassion, tenderhearted, wishing and willing well to all his creatures, but the seemingly needless pain which attends upon all living always raises obstinate questionings. If "Jesus is God," as the ultra orthodox are fond of asserting—quite unaware that they are uttering a heresy which even Athanasius repudiated—then his testimony would be final. But we are dealing with the record to find out what he was. One must not make use of a dogma to prove a fact.

"Except ye become as little children," he cries. True, the preacher glosses this to make it mean childlike, lovable, trustful, affectionate. But this was not his meaning. He lays it down as a rule of life, and predicates it on the presupposition that if one will only trust God he will deal with him as a parent does with a helpless child, feeding it when it is hungry, clothing it when it is cold, sheltering it when it is in danger. Christian teaching has generally accepted this as true in theory, and a few devout souls through the ages have acted upon it. The re-

sult has always been the same; they have either perished after a starved and meager life, or they have become a charge upon the mass of their fellows who have not followed their way. How could I in the same breath preach the duties of industry, thrift, foresight, and point my hearers to the beatitudes? How could I commend my hearers to the Sermon on the Mount and exhort them to fight for the right in the World War? It is true that use and custom and the ingenuity of commentators have blinded us to the incongruity. We so habitually keep our religious ideals and our secular ones in separate inclosures that they seldom confront each other, but when they do we must choose and reject. Jesus himself was uncompromising. But with transparent honesty he warned his possible disciples of what they must expect. They would be despised and rejected even as he was. They would be cast out of their synagogues, indeed they might not be able to live at all. His "way" and his "cross" were the same thing. The religion which we call by his name long ago diluted and enfeebled his exigent demand. It pleases itself by calling the few paltry restrictions which it lays upon conduct its "cross"! The Catholic Church understands Jesus correctly when it calls "the religious" those and only those who have turned their back upon and abandoned the world. But these are, and always have been, an insignificant percentage of those who call themselves Christians. The mendicant friar more nearly reproduces the life of Jesus than any other man living. He toils not, neither does he spin, he takes no thought for the morrow, for he declares God knows he has need of all these things.

It is often assumed that if only all men everywhere were to follow the precepts and example of Jesus all life's problems would be solved, all anxieties removed, all haunt-

ing apprehensions dismissed, all contrasts and envies of rich and poor resolved. Would they? So far as we can see, human life would simply come to a standstill. For all the motives and impulses which control men would cease to operate. Who would work if he were really assured that God will provide? How would he shelter himself after he had parted with his coat and his cloak to the first lazy ruffian who asked for them? What would become of his family after he had given to every one that asked and lent to every borrower? So far as we can see, all life, if it did not cease entirely, would become a continuous miracle. It is very noteworthy that the foremost apostles of Jesus appear to have been either ignorant or unmindful of his precepts. Paul, instead of exhorting his converts to take no thought of the morrow, bids them be diligent in business, tells them sternly that if a man will not work, neither shall he eat, and that he who provideth not for his own, especially them of his own household, hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel. If it be objected that all this is fighting a man of straw, that Jesus did not mean these precepts to be taken literally, the answer is, he did so mean them.

But after all, the great matter is, was Jesus' representation of God true? I do not know. This is the eternal, unanswered enigma of the Sphynx with her bountiful breasts and cruel claws. When I interrogate nature and experience I get but an equivocal reply. He may be well disposed, or ill disposed, or serenely indifferent. The only unhesitating answer is in the *obiter dicta* of Jesus. Assuming for him an eternal preëxistence in intimate spiritual union with God, his word would be conclusive. But this presumption carries with it intellectual and metaphysical difficulties which render it unthinkable. Even so we must believe that he used human speech to express

the convictions of a human consciousness. What validity had his personal conviction? Moreover, it can hardly be doubted that in his tragic end he realized that his trustful confidence had misled him. How else to interpret his heartbroken cry, "My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

So also as to his teaching as to the attitude of each man to his fellow men. "Resist not evil"; "if one smite you on the one cheek turn to him the other"; "if one take your coat give him your cloak also"; give to every beggar and lend to every borrower. Tolstoi and his kind maintain that in all this Jesus meant what he said. No doubt they are right. But they go on to insist that the counsel is intrinsically good and ought to be adopted as the rule of life; and here they are surely wrong. At this point conventional Christianity boggles and hesitates and distinguishes, afraid to follow and ashamed to turn away. The result is a continual disingenuousness, a paltering with honesty, a belief which is only simulated, an ideal which instinct protests against being put to practice. It was in the eighties, while the world was listening to Tolstoi, that the question was forced upon me. With trembling I asked myself, Is it possible that Jesus was wrong? I saw that whether he was right or wrong my own attitude and that of Christians generally was unsatisfactory. I was driven to confess to myself that his teaching in these regards not only could not, but ought not, to be followed. Its practical adoption generally could not but dissolve human society. Here and there and now and then there is a man or woman of the sweet, lovable, trustful disposition of Jesus. They are simple, affectionate, childlike, winning. Every one loves them. By a sort of universal consent they are looked after, shielded from the perils into which their trustfulness would lead them. No one would wish them to be other than they

are. But they are safe, indeed they can only exist at all because they are exceptional. The *communis sensus* of men recognizes that a world full of such would wreck itself against the stern facts of life. I found, therefore, that my love and admiration for the fair, gracious, lovable, Nazarene was unaffected. When I examined my feeling more carefully I found it a sort of tender, affectionate, regretful sympathy when I saw the tragic consequence to himself of the "way" which he followed and preached. But to hold up his life as a practical model and example I could not. The dilemma, *si non Deus non bonus,* did not disturb me. Accepting the record as it stands, purged only of its prodigies, there could be no question of his goodness. But this only on the condition that he lived in illusion. It appears clear from the Synoptic Gospels that a sense of an unique personal relation with God possessed him from the time when he appeared on the bank of Jordan until he hung on the cross at Calvary. At first it seems to have been hesitant and transitory, but later all doubtfulness ceases, until his confidence was cruelly shattered at last, as was shown by his dying cry, *"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthanai!"*

CHAPTER VII

JESUS AND CHRISTIANITY

WHAT is the place and function of the historic Jesus in that mighty complex which we call Christianity? Was he its founder? Did it come into the world new with him? Do its creeds, its sacraments, its institutions derive all their validity from him? What was his relation to the primitive church? If it did not originate with him where did it come from?

To satisfy these inquiries I set myself for the first time to really study the origins. A generation earlier the attempt would have been hopeless. It is amazing how little attention had been given to this fundamental question. It was everywhere taken for granted that there was no obscurity about it. The whole matter was perfectly simple. To a world which knew not God and therefore had no religion came a Person from without the universe bringing a revelation of God, a system of truth, a rule of life, gathered about him a group of men whom he commissioned to go out into the world and proclaim these things. They went forth, gathered recruits, organized them into societies; these scattered groups coalesced into an ecumenical body which is the Church. The whole process was furthered and indeed made possible by the exhibition of innumerable miracles and prodigies. It vindicated its supramundane origin by presenting a morality so exalted by contrast with the universal degradation of

heathen society that it drew to itself as with a magnet all who hungered and thirsted after righteousness.

In this belief I had grown up. Up to that time it had not occurred to my mind that any other explanation of the phenomena was possible. But now that I felt obliged to eliminate from the history all the miraculous element it became clear that the motive power which alone would have made this course of events possible had disappeared, and the historic phenomena must be otherwise accounted for. When I seriously attempted to examine the beginnings of Christianity the first thing which arrested my attention was the unaccountable rapidity of its spread. This was so great that it appeared impossible. Of course if supernatural impulse and guidance be assumed the surprise will disappear. But to admit that is to remove the whole matter from the realm of reasonable examination altogether. The miraculous has no history. The more closely I looked at the story the doubt deepened as to whether the facts were as had been accepted.

The accepted date of the death of Jesus is about 35 A.D. According to the New Testament, at that time "the number of the disciples together was about a hundred and twenty." The accepted account is that, starting with this little company of Jews Christianity spread over the whole earth. The Acts of the Apostles, an anonymous tract written about the year 65, gives some account of the first stage of the movement. But the earliest information we possess concerning it is in certain letters written by Paul. For the first thirty years after the death of Jesus we have the New Testament account. For the succeeding eighty years we have practically no information at all. We have therefore to estimate and explain the extent of the movement as it shows itself at the end of that period.

First I tried to picture to myself the conditions and

the means of propagation existing at that time. It is impossible for us adequately to represent to ourselves a world so unlike our own. The art of printing was unknown. All communication at a distance between man and man must be written with pen and ink. But paper in our sense of the word was nonexistent. The material used for the purpose was very scarce and very costly. Moreover, a very small percentage of the people—how small we cannot know—were able to either read or write. Any document written for circulation must be copied laboriously by hand, carried by hand, and read to the people addressed. Facilities for travel were also nonexistent. It is true there were a few great, paved highways leading from Rome, east, north, and west, but these *caminæ reale* were for military use, and there were no other roads. Except along these great highways wheeled vehicles were unknown. In Horace's account of his trip with Mæcenas from Rome to Brindisi he says it required fifteen days, traveling day and night, and this with every advantage which the highest official could command. Anthony's messages from Syria to the capital required two months or more for the journey. Cæsar's dispatches from the Strait of Dover to Rome required more than a month. There were no accommodations for travelers on the way. The missionary, like Paul, must literally face perils by flood, by hunger, by robbers, by wild beasts, by shipwreck and cold.

Now, under these conditions, how rapidly and how far was it possible for a new religious movement to spread in a given period? But even within the brief period covered by the Acts of the Apostles the number of "Christians" is unaccountably large. There were "myriads"—tens of thousands—in Judea alone. Within forty years there were "churches" in Antioch, Damascus, Arabia,

Africa, Italy, Spain, Greece, and all over Roman Asia. In the city of Rome, Tacitus says, there were "a huge multitude." All this is supposed to have come about within a space of not more than forty years. Think how short a time this is, less than the time since the Franco-Prussian War. And all this without a page of printed matter, without means of travel beyond six miles an hour, in a population where not one in a hundred could read, and where barriers of race and language were met at every turn.

Now here is the problem; the fact of this great number of "Christians" throughout the known world appears to be beyond question. But the accepted explanation of the fact seems to be utterly inadequate. The custom of church historians has been to explain it by laying stress upon the unity of the world in one empire; the universal peace prevailing at the epoch; the wide diffusion of the Greek language; the great Roman roads as means of rapid communication; together with the burning zeal of the first disciples. But these altogether fail to explain. The unity of the empire was only superficial, and in so far as it existed as a sentiment of nationality was an obstacle and not a help toward the propagation of a new religion. The world was far from being at peace. One of the most stubborn and dangerous wars Rome ever waged was raging at the time. The Greek language was but a *lingua franca,* and was not understood by the generality.

Very little is known about the "churches" at the end of the New Testament times. Their form of organization, their manner of worship, their discipline, their liturgies and creeds are all obscure. They evidently varied greatly among themselves. Certainly they did not constitute that "one, undivided, primitive church" so fondly imagined. Then a cloud of still more dense obscurity closed over them and hid them from sight for well nigh

a hundred years. From the arrival of Paul at Rome till the time of Irenæus the history of the church is a blank. "There is hardly a thing for the archæologist to register, a mere handful of inscriptions, possibly the cenaculum at Jerusalem, the house of Clement at Rome, a portion of the Catacombs are all that we possess." A spurious paragraph in Josephus, an incidental mention by Tacitus, an ambiguous allusion by Suetonius, a letter from Pliny when governor of Bithynia, and that is all. Toward the end of the second century the obscurity is lightened by the flames of persecution. From the appearance which the church presented then we may gain a clew to account for its surprising extent a century earlier. When we look at it intently we will be amazed to find how exactly it reproduces the appearance of institutions which had been widespread in the world long before Jesus was born. We are forced to ask, Is this only a resemblance? Or is it identity? Is it possible that "Christianity" has a far longer history than we have been in the habit of supposing? To believe that what we call by that name originated with a little group of simple peasants in an obscure corner of Asia and within a space of forty years spread all over the world is impossible. But if we frankly recognize it for what it is, a Syncretism composed of and continued from religious beliefs, institutions and customs in general use within the pre-Christian world the difficulty disappears.

Like others, I had always taken it for granted that the world before Christ was a dark moral wilderness, through which meandered a single pure stream having its source in Abraham. The old "Dispensation" of Judaism and the new one of Christianity concluded the religious history of the race. But having freed my mind from preconceptions, I was able to see how naïve and inadequate this conception was. I was amazed to find how far from the truth my

notions had been. Instead of a "heathen" world lying in moral darkness, I saw one alive with moral earnestness. The second and first centuries before Christ were probably the most religious epochs the world has ever experienced. Instead of a "heathen" world lying in moral darkness I saw one alive with moral earnestness. Strangely enough this religious yearning and struggle lay altogether outside of Judaism. Our religious ancestry is not to be traced through the line of Abraham. While the Hebrew race bestowed gifts through some of their prophets and some of their poets their institutions and their people remained throughout their whole history untouched by prophet or psalmist. The religious conceptions of the modern world derive from the Gentile and not from the Jew. Judaism remained spiritually stupid and morally sordid from first to last. Having become possessed with its fantastic conceit of being "a chosen people," it drew apart in arrogant seclusion and perished in its own shell. Its prophets prophesied in vain. Even in their most exalted passages there is a strain of abnormality, if not madness. Jeremiah takes a long journey to the Euphrates to hide his linen girdle in a hole in a rock, and another long journey to fetch it home again rotten. Hosea marries a prostitute, thinking God had commanded him to do so. Ezekiel digs a hole in the wall of his house and through it instead of the door removes his household goods. Isaiah strips himself naked and parades before the people.

CHAPTER VIII

DEBTOR BOTH TO JEW AND GREEK

It is hard to say when and where began the habit of tracing Religion to the Jew as we trace Beauty to the Greek and Law to the Roman. But, like so many other commonplaces, it has become so fixed that one is surprised when he finds that it has no foundation. Their ethical ideals and their practical morals were in no way superior to the Gentiles surrounding them.

"The general notion is that shortly before the coming of Christ the pagans, tired of their old gods, and lost to all sense of decency, had given themselves up to an unbridled immorality founded on atheistic ideas. Such a view, founded perhaps on somewhat misty recollections of the Roman satirists and a little second-hand knowledge of early Christian writers, is almost the reverse of the truth. There has probably been no time in the history of mankind when all classes were more given up to thoughts of religion, or when they strained more fervently after high ethical ideals. The cause of this misconception is clear enough. Half a century ago the world was without leaders or guides in such matters, nor had it the material upon which to found its opinions. Above all, what has been called the catastrophic view of the Christian religion was still in fashion. Although our spiritual pastors and masters were never tired of telling us that God's ways are not as our ways, they invariably talked and wrote as if they were, and thought an omnipotent creator with

eternity before him must needs behave like a schoolboy in possession of gunpowder for the first time. Hence, the remarkable victory which, in the words of Gibbon, the Christian faith obtained over the established religions of earth was, in the view of the orthodox, chiefly due to the miraculous powers placed at the disposal of the primitive church, and it was considered impious to look farther.[1]

"The popular notion of the moral condition of the pre-Christian world is chiefly derived from such witnesses as Petronius, Juvenal, Martial, Ovid, and Paul. No doubt their testimony concerning the circles in which they moved is correct. But in every age there are many kinds of society presenting every moral condition. Juvenal was a soured and embittered man, who knew Roman life from the gossip of the servants' halls. Martial wrote unblushingly for the lovers of indecency. Petronius, the courtier, went slumming with Nero and wrote in his "Satiricon" what he saw. Ovid, the debonair companion of the gilded youths, made his verses for their delectation. And Paul, believing himself to be one of those few who waited to be caught up unto the heavens with the Lord, looked on all the rest of the world alike as ready to perish. A human society so sodden in bestiality as these picture it would have perished in its own rottenness. But human nature is never all bad. Even at the time when the city of Rome was a cloaca of abominations there were multitudes, untouched by her vices, living pure, quiet, devout lives. Even in the same circles which the satirists paint in such black colors we find Seneca and Tacitus and Pliny exhibiting and preaching as exalted a type of righteous life as has been seen anywhere since. With all his sins, Seneca was a better man than was Tertullian, even tried by Christian standards. Pliny was incomparably a more admirable man than Francis of Assisi. There was in Italy and Gaul and Spain many a grand *seigneur* of hon-

[1] Legge, "Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity," Introduction.

est and regular life, like Pliny's uncle or Spurenus or Vergilius Rufus. There were many wedded lives as pure as those of Arria and Pietus or Pliny and Calpurnia. There were homes like those at Frejus or Como or Brescia, in which boys and girls were reared in severe simplicity. Many a brief stone record remains which shows that even in the world of slaves and freedmen there were always in the darkest days humble people with honest, kindly ideals, virtuous family affections, sustaining one another by help and love." [1]

The world was very evil; the world always is. One who looks for evil in the time of Augustus or Tiberius will find it abundantly, but if he be candid he will allow that the Christian world of Constantine was no better. Indeed the religious world of Cæsar had this advantage that it was humbly and ardently seeking the truth, while that of Constantine was busy with murderous controversies concerning the truth which it believed itself to possess.

With our prepossessions it is startling to find that in the widespread search for God which marked the two centuries before Christ the Jews took no part. They did, indeed, within that period develop their notion of a Messiah, but this, their very highest spiritual achievement, arose from race-conceit and selfishness. They looked for one who should "restore again the kingdom to Israel." In the popular mind this aspiration was altogether without what we would call religious significance. The conventional notion that Israel alone knew the true God and passed on the knowledge as a dying bequest to the world is utterly without foundation. For after all any real appraisement of a religion must be in terms of its ethical effect. It only needs the reiterated testimony of the

[1] Bigg, "Roman Society in the Time of Nero," p. 144.

prophets themselves to show how hopelessly Judaism failed in this regard. They prophesied in vain. What need we more than the witness of Jesus to the moral obstinacy of the race? "Ye are the sons of them that slew the prophets. I send you prophets and wise men, some of them ye shall kill and crucify and scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that upon you shall be all the righteous blood shed on earth from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias, the son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the Altar."

And yet we go on repeating parrotlike that "salvation is of the Jews"—and this in face of the fact that even their language was never the speech of Christianity. The priest and the Levite and the scribe could never frame to pronounce its shibboleth either in tongue or heart.

As I came to realize these things I became convinced that Christianity must have some other, or some additional, source and origin than the one to which it is traditionally referred. It did not originate in Judaism, and if it began at that time it was physically impossible for it to achieve the ecumenical extent to which it had reached within forty years after Jesus' death. Could it have been in existence in some form for a much longer period? Two questions arose, Was anything like it in the world before Christ? and, Where, when, and how did Jesus come into it? In other words, did Christianity come into the world at a certain definite date, a unique divine intrusion? Or did it arise out of the world conditions then existing? Was it an advent or an evolution?

The orthodox mind, which tries to be scientific also, attempts to combine the two conceptions. It emphasizes the "fullness of time," traces the process through the "Old Dispensation," and links the old and the new together by a process which is neither or both natural and

supernatural. But it does not perceive that it is supernatural throughout. That is to say, according to it all the persons and forces concerned in it are but automata. The issue does not spring naturally from the conditions, but is the outcome of arbitrary guidance and manipulation at every step. The fatal fault of the contention is that it postulates an unworthy God. Except for the "chosen" individuals and tribes it leaves all the rest of teeming humanity outside the religious plans of the Creator, leaves them to perish unenlightened in their darkness, allows them to contribute nothing to the divine purpose, regards them only as foils to his chosen peoples and plans.

Of course all these preconceptions lay deep in my own consciousness. Nothing is so difficult as to escape from the control of beliefs which one has inherited and grown up with. No matter that he has come to see that they are erroneous or unworthy, they still lie in wait for him. If he be for a moment off his guard they rise up and occupy their old places. To see the truth about the real origin of Christianity one must first wrench himself free from the grip of the Jew. So long as he looks for its muniments in the Old Testament he will go astray. Later on I will consider the problem of where and how Judaism came into and gave its color to those streams of religious movement which debouched into the broad river that we call Christianity. To the development of this world-wide ethical and spiritual ideal many peoples and many institutions contributed. But the beginnings of rational ethics were not made among the Hebrews but among Babylonians, Greeks, and Egyptians. As has been truly said, "the controlling idea of Judaism made any real ethic impossible. A God of arbitrary and passionate will took the place of both natural and moral law." It is true that a few of the prophets and poets of Israel seem to voice our

highest and deepest religious experiences, but it may well be asked how much we read out of their words and how much we read into them. In all ages Christians have found solace and consolation in the Twenty-third Psalm. If by chance the contribution of Euripides had become equally familiar would not many souls have found comfort in his hymn as well;—

> No grudge hath He at the greatest,
> No scorn of mean estate,
> But to all that liveth His wine he giveth,
> Griefless, immaculate.

And would not the hymn of the heathen Cleanthes stand worthily beside the "Lead Kindly Light" of the Christian cardinal.

> Lead thou me, O God, and thou O Fate,
> Thy appointed will I wait;
> Only lead me, I shall go
> With no flagging step or slow;
> Even though degenerate I be.
> And consent reluctantly,
> None the less I follow Thee.

At the time when Christianity emerged, the world was in the throes of a religious revolution and eagerly in quest of some fresh vision of the divine from whatever quarter it might come. In Damascus and Carthage and Alexandria and Athens and Rome the problems of man and God were being agitated. But Judea was strangely untouched. While the Gentile world, weary of its sins, skeptical and doubtful of its cults, was yearning toward "The Unknown God," Israel, self-satisfied and supercilious, was busy with mint and cummin, and framing those fantastic apocalypses in which it saw itself with its feet on the neck of kings and all their goods in its possession.

CHAPTER IX

PAUL'S CHRISTIANITY

In the midst of this religious ferment appears the movement with which the New Testament is occupied. All the information we possess about it comes from two sources, which are substantially one—Paul, a converted Jew, and Luke, a converted heathen, who compiled the Acts of the Apostles. Paul ignores everything except what comes within his own plans and experiences. The Acts, after a little space given to the very earliest days of the movement of Jerusalem, has to do chiefly with the sayings and doings of Paul. From both these sources it is easy to discern that a large part of the movement antedated and lay quite outside of their account. It is a pity we do not have the story of other missionaries beside Paul, other and earlier ones. The Acts purport to give an account of the few days, or at most few weeks, immediately following the death of Jesus. At that time it says that upward of three thousand adherents were "added" in a single day. In the same sentence it states that they joined immediately in the "liturgy" and "sacrament"—as though liturgy and sacrament were already well known and recognized institutions. No doubt they were. But institutions of this kind require a long time for their development. In the same connection it says that "great multitudes of the priests" accepted the faith. On another day five thousand at once came in. Paul says that at his last visit to Jerusalem the Jews who had become Christians could only be counted by

"myriads," that is, tens of thousands. In this connection it is important to note that all the names of converts mentioned are Greek. Even the deacons chosen were all Greek—Stephen, Prochorus, Nicalos, Timon, Parmenas. Again, Paul in his letter to the Galatians written about 54, twenty years after the crucifixion, speaks of incidents which had occurred in his own life years before, and mentions that he had even then been a Christian for many years, so that by his account the movement must have been in progress long before the accepted date of the death of Jesus. In his letter to the Romans he sends greetings to his distinguished friends Andronicus and Junius, and adds in parenthesis, "who became Christians before I did." In the Acts, Paul's conversion is placed at the latest only a few months after the crucifixion, yet in his second letter to Timothy he appeals to him to bear in mind the Christian devotion of his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, thus assuming the existence of the church three generations before A.D. 60. These are but samples of places in the New Testament where one catches glimpses behind the lines of a church long antecedent.

It seems quite impossible to make the accepted account of the beginning of the church to fit the facts. That account runs thus: Upon the death of Jesus his few friends and followers, being disillusioned and disappointed, abandoned him and scattered. But within a few days or weeks —the accounts in the Gospels are confused and contradictory—hearing the story of his reappearance, drew together again in a little group in an upper chamber in Jerusalem. Presently their number reached to a hundred and twenty. They were all Jews, and their hopes and plans were all Judaistic. At the outset they had no thought or wish to separate from their tribal cult. They observed its ceremonies and frequented its temple. The

only thing which distinguished them from other Jews was their belief that their "Messiah" had already come in the person of Jesus. Of this they were able to convince other Jews, chiefly from among those who lived outside of Palestine, and admitted them to their company. This went on for a period which is represented as very brief. This is all there was of it at that stage. The conversion of Paul seems to have occurred almost immediately following the "forty days" after the death of Jesus. But Paul the Hellenist, not satisfied with the narrow outlook of the Jerusalem company, proposed to take in the Gentiles to the society. The others bitterly opposed this and a controversy arose which split the organization in two. The church in Judea confined itself to Jewish membership and after a generation or two dwindled away and disappeared. Thereafter the church became the church of Paul. The rest of the story in the New Testament is concerned entirely with his adventures and opinions. But within twenty-five years after his conversion, as we discover from both Christian and pagan sources, churches calling themselves Christian were literally all over the world. So the account runs. This period is clearly far too short for such a growth under the physical conditions then existing, the lack of means of communication, and of a common language. So swift and extended a spread of a new religion is simply impossible. The extent of Christianity at A.D. 70 must accounted for in some other way.

About the year 70 the idyllic church of the apostles disappears from view. When the church reappears in history four generations later it bears little resemblance to that of apostolic times. But it does bear so close a resemblance as to be practically undistinguishable from a cult which prevailed all over the world two centuries earlier. Even as late as the fifth century A.D. the church

was far more pagan than it was Christian, after the fashion of Paul's societies. Nor do we find it bearing any more likeness to Judaism. Its ideas, its cults, its phraseology, its institutions and sacraments are all those which had been in vogue for centuries in the pagan world. It is true that the Christianity of Paul was "to the Greeks foolishness," but that was not the Christianity of Tertullian and Jerome.

The essence of Paul's religion was the "Parousia," the expected reappearance of Christ and the end of the æon. When this expectation faded away in disappointment the motive power of his evangel went with it. The ideas, the motives, the discipline which belonged to it were no longer possible after the disciples had stood for two generations gazing up into the heavens in vain. The great movement, within which this society was but an episode, went on its way. It adopted and absorbed the "Christ" from the society which bore his name. After four centuries during which it was doubtful whether the movement would ultimately bear the name of Isis or Mithra or Christ it has since been called by the name it now bears. But there was no sudden break or violent revolution. The worship at St. Peter's or Canterbury or the silent waiting in the Quaker meeting are all alike in a continuous line with that of the sodalities of Tarsus, Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome and the villages of Roman Asia.

I am well aware how incredible and fantastic this may appear to the average Christian. The accepted notion concerning the origin and spread of Christianity is so ingrained in the very structure of his mind. So it had seemed to me until after long study of the facts of the case. I had always thought of Christianity as "coming" like lightning from heaven, shining into a dark world. True, I had also accepted the incompatible notion that it

was a plant which sprang from Judaism, within which it had grown and ripened, and that the Messiah was its fruition. I had always conceived of heathenism as a black background against which the drama of salvation had been staged. How the Jew came to take possession of the stage, impose his old libretto on the drama, and gain the credit for its production is a problem remaining unsolved until more information is available concerning the blank history of the century and a half following Paul's disappearance and before the Church emerged whose history since it has been possible to follow.

The short-lived church of Paul and his companions escaped from Judaism with a painful wrench, but even he could not escape his instinct of racial superiority. Israel is for him still the true vine and the Gentile is an inferior stock grafted in and drawing its spiritual life from the old stalk. One of the strangest things in life is the way in which an idea having once got lodgment in the mind of the multitude becomes part of its mental furniture. The accepted connection of Christianity with Judaism is one of such notions. In spite of the fact that of all the contemporaries of Jesus the Hebrews were the least advanced in spiritual apprehension, that they were impervious to his spirit, that their whole organization moved to get rid of him, that the meager first fruits of Christianity quickly shriveled and perished in the inhospitable soil of Palestine, that from the beginning the church grew in heathen soil and gained its membership from those reared in paganism—in spite of all this we accept as religious truth the tribal boast of John that "salvation is of the Jews"! We hold as sacrosanct and read in worship their falsified history, fill our hymns and prayers with aspirations for the peace of Israel and sing Jerusalem the Golden. We give highest honor to their far from ad-

mirable heroes and teach our children about them; we read for edification the unintelligible rhapsodies of their prophets; we identify Jesus with their incomprehensible Messiah, even though we think of him under his Greek attribute of the Christ. The explanation of the paradox probably is that it served as a quasi-historical basis for that artificial system of theology spun by the church in the third and fourth centuries. Without it the "plan of salvation" would appear for what it is, a cunningly devised fabric standing on no historic foundation. So it will no doubt go on for long time to come. The force of inertia acts in the religious as well as in the secular sphere.

CHAPTER X

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE WORLD

It is to be lamented that we know so little about that period with which the Acts and the Epistles deal. It is marked off from all that went before and all that followed in religious history by two characteristics. All its movements were about two foci, the Resurrection and the second coming of Jesus. It is altogether other-worldly. Its motto is "the friendship of the world is enmity to God." This other-worldliness is the dark pigment with which it was to discolor the great world stream of religion. It is really all that survives in current thought of "primitive Christianity." The accepted ethics of Christianity cannot be understood at all unless we bear steadily in mind what were the controlling beliefs of Paul and his contemporaries. They confidently expected the risen Christ to come in his glory, and the end of the world. This was not a theological speculation with them, as it has been at sundry times since. They were perfectly persuaded that within a few months, a few years at farthest, the world as it is would be transformed by the Son of Man coming to judge. If the Gospels report him correctly this was unquestionably Jesus' own expectation. It is true he disclaims a precise knowledge of the day and hour of his "coming in the clouds with great power and glory," but he certainly believed that it would be within a brief period. He expected his work in the world to be catastrophic. He spoke of the Kingdom as growing as a grain of mustard

seed, but he thought of the seed as having been planted long ago and now ripening to pluck. The idea of being a central power in the heavens, waiting while his apostles should slowly convert the world, was foreign to his thought. They "would not have gone through all the cities of Judea till the Son of Man come." When he assured his friends that for a little while they should see him and again for a little while they would not see him, both he and they understood him to mean what he said, that is, it would only be for "a little while." "For the Son of Man shall come with the glory of his Father with the angels and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you there be some standing here who shall not see death till they see the Son of Man come."

This conviction controlled the teaching and conduct of the first generation of his followers. They did not think of themselves as missionaries undertaking the long, slow task of persuading the world. They were heralds sent forth to announce a coronation. This is the burden of their message. The very first of their writings which has survived, the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, concerns itself solely with this expectation. These people of Thessaly were waiting for his coming, but meanwhile some of them had died. Would these therefore miss the glory of the event? Paul assured them they need not be alarmed, for "these that have fallen asleep will God bring with him, for we that are left until the coming of the Lord will not precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive shall together with them be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." In the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians

Paul looks forward, not to being among them who shall be "raised incorruptible," but among the living of whom he says "we shall be changed." The whole New Testament is dominated by this belief. The Coming for which they waited was not that "far off, divine event, toward which the whole creation moves"; it was the great finale which was to arrive while they lived. "The time is short"; by this they did not mean at all the shortness and uncertainty of human life. They meant that the great round world had but at most a few years to endure.

Now, a people who wholeheartedly held such a conviction would of necessity conform their lives to it. The ethics and economics fitted for a stable world would be altogether unsuitable for one which was to perish tomorrow. James says "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." Peter says, "The end of all things is at hand." John says, "Children, it is the last times." Believing this, how could they have any interest or concern with the things of common life? Nor did they. Their ceaseless exhortation was to hold aloof from them. Even concerning such a practical thing as marriage Paul counsels his converts that they may marry or not as it pleases them, but upon the whole he advises against it because the time is short and their energies had better not be withdrawn from the solemn waiting and preparation. He exhorts them to postpone all their differences and disputes, to judge nothing before the time, "until the Lord come." Says Dr. Martineau:

"A natural and reasonable attitude toward a world and the things of a world which had already run its course and was waiting to have its affairs wound up would be altogether unsuited to one in which life was meant to be permanent and stable. All human occupations rest on the assumption of permanence in the constitution of

things; nor is it less true of a planet than of a farm that mere tenants at will, unsecured by lease, and even served already with notice to quit, will undertake no improvements. What interest would attach to the administration of law on behalf of a property which was not worth a month's purchase? Who would sit down to study the pharmacopœia on board a sinking ship? The fields would scarce be tilled which the angel with the flaming sword was about to reap. All the crafts of industry, all the adventures of commerce are held together by a given element of time, and when deprived of this fall into inanity."

In the New Testament all the relations of domestic life and all the obligations of citizenship are either ignored or presented on the passive side. The slave is advised not to care about his liberty, on the express ground that it is not worth while. It is better for every one to continue as he is and to regard himself as already dead to a world which is itself under sentence. "If the apostles had lived on till their mistake wore itself out and they had discovered the permanence of the world, had they postponed the writing of Scripture till the lesson of experience had been learned, their scheme of applied morals would have been very different." But they did not so live. Unfortunately their precepts which were framed for life in a world about to pass away have been carried forward and imposed as an ideal ethic for the normal human life. This inflicted upon Christianity that inward contradiction between what is ostensibly the ideal of moral conduct and the everyday necessities of living. The Christian is told on Sundays—and he tries to believe it—that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." All the other days he lives with the world and for his very life must be on friendly terms with it. I know, of course, the

glosses and interpretations by means of which the contradiction is explained away. The world upon which Paul and his associates turned their backs is made out to be a very good world after all; one has only to love it and hate it at the same time; to be a good citizen of the kingdom of Satan and remember at the same time that "his citizenship is in heaven." It is here that one meets the difficulty when he attempts to proclaim what has lately come to be called "the Social Message of Christianity." According to the New Testament, it has no social message. It is unsocial by its very nature. It is in the world as a pilgrim and stranger who passes through it with his eyes fixed on heaven. Its interest and solicitude are only for the "brethren." The energetic Christian to-day who deplores the apathy of the church in the presence of social and economic evils cudgels a dull ass. The bent of her nature in this regard was fixed at the time when she looked for the "coming" and cared not a whit about the world she was about to leave.

This false estimate of the world which was formed while waiting for the Parousia has persisted and has distorted the life of Christianity. It is the black drop in the Christian blood. It is a perpetual fear poisoning innocent pleasure. It has been his skeleton at the feast of life, has flung its shadow over the fair face of nature, has set him in a false attitude toward himself and existence. If earth were really what it is piously called, "this miserable and naughty world," what is it but for him to touch it at as few points as possible? Under this obsession the monk and the anchorite flee to the cloister and the cave. Why not? The ordinary Christian entangled with the world in bonds to wife and children and society must "live in the world as not of it." He may go into the field or market place

to win his fortunes, but having garnered he must withdraw. His aspiration is

> Guide me O thou great Jehovah,
> Pilgrim through this barren land.

The pilgrim and stranger can have no social message for the land he passes through. It would be impossible to estimate the mischief this false judgment of the world has wrought. It confuses the conscience and stultifies the judgment of the Christian every day. It produces the Puritan, the nun, the Quaker and the hypocrite all alike. Moreover, it does not derive from the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels. To him the world was his Father's and was very good. True, he bade men seek first the kingdom of heaven, but he assures them that all good things would be added thereto. He transmutes the waters of life into generous wine and not to bitter herbs. It is the evil inheritance from Pauline times.

CHAPTER XI

PRE-CHRISTIAN PIETY

Is it possible to recover and reconstruct any lifelike picture of the religious life of the world in the century before Christ? By the "world" we mean substantially the people within the Roman empire. Our own ancestors dwelt outside of it. They were drinking themselves drunk to the honor of Woden and Friga in the forests of the north, or squatting around stone altars where their painted priests slew and offered their human sacrifices. The conquests of the mighty Alexander three centuries earlier had broken up all old national divisions, and Rome had gathered the fragments into one empire. But Alexander's victories had wrought far more profound changes in the religious than in the political sphere. The age-long conception of religion had been that it was a national or tribal affair. Each nation and tribe had its own religion and its own God. Its religion was associated with the feeling of patriotism or of race. Its duties and obligations were public. Its rewards and penalties were tribal or social. By breaking down national separations Alexander destroyed the religious habit of the ages. Thenceforward religion became less and less tribal or communal and more and more an individual, personal affair. It ceased to be the punctilious practice of a local cult and became a matter of personal salvation. The change marked an epoch in the history of the human soul. It opened the way for the religion of all future times. The futile philosophies and observances of an external religion were replaced by

a deep and earnest longing for a religion more satisfying to the deeper emotions, a religion which should offer divine help to human need, divine guidance amid the darkness of the time, above all a divine light in the mystery of death.

To satisfy this longing all the religions of all tribes and peoples were drawn upon. The same men might, and did, adopt half a dozen of them at the same time. They were examined, tried, rejected, and what was helpful appropriated. From Greece, Egypt, Persia, Syria, Rome, and farther Ind were drawn the materials which were to be cast into the alembic and distilled into that Syncretism which became the working religion of the peoples. In this syncretizing process it was natural that those basic religious conceptions which lie deepest in human nature should come to the surface, and that the rites and ceremonies which figured them should be elaborated. Among the Roman people proper the old forms and observances still held a place. They were intertwined with the whole fabric of public and social life. The little godlets who took kindly interest in humble folk were still cherished. They were invoked at birth, at marriage, at harvest time and vintage, on going on a journey or building a house, strangely enough on every occasion except at death. But Jupiter and Juno and the great gods generally invoked by the state were too busy and too far off.

"Little people wanted little gods who were not too proud to attend to the oxen and the babies or the profits of the farm and the shop. The worship of these field and household gods was the most popular and the most enduring. It lasted on until these gods had their names changed and became the Christian Saints. Their place and function has undergone no change save that of their names." [1]

[1] Bigg, "Origin of Christianity," p. 8.

But in a larger sense Jove and Neptune and Pluto had been dethroned. The sure indication of this was that they had become the subjects of the same kind of pleasantry with which the devil is treated to-day. A satirist of the time[1] represents a council of the gods summoned on Olympus to take steps to keep themselves from starving. One of them reported that he had not had a smell of incense for he could not tell how long. Another complained that even when people swore by him they smiled and took it as a joke. Another that he had had nothing but one scrawny goat in a year. They all reported that they were being crowded out by the myriads of new gods flocking in from every quarter. Superficial historians have been in the habit of finding in this chaos nothing which may truly be called a religion at all. They can comprehend the classic cults of Greece and Rome and the mechanical system of the Jews. These appear to be reasonable because they are capable of being analyzed and described. But in truth this intelligibility is due to the fact that these cults lacked the very essentials of religion. Judaism was but the fancied "covenant" between God and a selected tribe. The old religion of Greece was poetry. It grew from the fine imagination of that gifted people. The Roman cult was practical and external and had regard chiefly to the state. It affected individuals only as citizens. Its final development into the apotheosis of the emperor was logical and reasonable.

In reality it was in the chaotic heathen world that the deepest aspirations of the soul were seeking and finding expression. It was among them that the foundation truth of all religion, the Unity of God, was first discerned. It is an error to credit the Hebrew with this discovery. The Jew, even the prophet, was never more than a henotheist,

[1] Lucius: Dialogues.

his "one" God was such only in the sense that he was above all gods. His was a monotheism of power, not of being. The Stoic philosopher touched truth far more nearly when he found a central unity in the universe and called it the "Generative Reason," the "Divine Word," the "Logos." From it came all things. In it all things found their rationality. It—or he—is the "Vicegerent" and "Embassador" of God and makes intercession for the world. By and through him men may attain to divine vision and "be lifted out of and above himself." These conceptions and terms are all from Gentile sources. They were spread with more or less distinctness throughout the Græco-Roman world. Also the idea of an archetypal, heavenly man was common to all the cults then current. Salvation was everywhere related in some way, often confused and grotesque, to this divine or semidivine Person. It was everywhere and always a religion of "redemption." During the two centuries before Christ another age-long idea coalesced with it, namely that of securing spiritual unity with this Divinity through the sacramental eating of his body and drinking of his blood. "The blood was the life." Religion was everywhere sacramental. Our notion of religion being based upon a theological creed was unknown. The gods were not defined, in fact they were worshiped in idea. It might be impersonated in any one or all, Osiris, Mithra, Messiah, Isis, or Magna Mater.

For purposes of worship societies sprang up everywhere. Sodalities and "colleges" by the thousand with their little temples abounded in every city, town, and hamlet. The ruins of these places of worship constitute the bulk of all the remains of the time now extant. The age was profoundly even though confusedly religious, more so than any succeeding age, even the present. Compared with

later ages, life was amazingly barren and empty. For the common people there were none of those interests which now occupy and fill life. For them there were no books, no news, no politics, no travel, no industry, nothing but the plodding routine of every day and every day alike. Into this vacant life flowed the religions of the East. The flood was turbid and murky, but it spread in every direction. While the speculations of philosophers concerned themselves with the problems of divinity and humanity the interest of the common people found satisfaction in these little sodalities, colleges, societies, which we may call their churches, for in fact they were such.

The most widely diffused cult was that of Mithra. Like the other religions its central feature was the "Mysteries." Religion was characteristically sacramental. The name by which their sacraments was known, the Mysteries, passed on into Christianity and is the name still in use among us. These sacramental rites all revolved about the central idea of a Savior-God. This title of "Savior" was applied by the Jews to their Messiah, by Greeks to Zeus, Helios, Dionysos, by Egyptians to Osiris and Isis. In their phrase "he taketh away the sin of the world" and is the judge at the last judgment. From the mysteries of Mithra, Osiris, and Isis comes the "easy yoke" and the "true vine." Osiris dies and is restored. To become one with him is the mystical passion of the worshipers. All alike proffer immortality through their sacraments. In their organizations and rituals they are in many a way *simulacra* of the Christian rites and ceremonies which we see now. In 1852 the Fathers Huc and Gabet brought from the East this description of a cult which has survived substantially unchanged since three centuries before Christ:

"The Grand Lama, an infallible representative of the Most High, is surrounded by minor lamas, much like cardinals; with its bishops wearing miters, its celibate priests with shaven crowns, cope, dalmatic and censer; its cathedrals with clergy gathered in the choir; its vast monasteries filled with monks and nuns vowed to celibacy and chastity; with shrines of saints and angels; its service with striking resemblance to the Mass; antiphonal choirs; intoning prayers; recital of creeds; the offering and adoration of bread on an altar; drinking from a chalice by the priest."

The belief in a divine Trinity has been extant since the time of Plato, had been elaborated in Egypt, and had spread through the Greek-speaking world. A "Logos" or "Word," or conscious personality mediating between men and God and interpreting each to the other was a commonplace of religious speculation. The idea of salvation through eating the flesh and drinking the blood of a sacrificed god, and its actual practice in the rituals of religious associations was a widespread custom. "Washing in the blood" of a sacrificed victim to the washing away of sin was the supreme act of men who were grieved and wearied with the burden of their sins. The Taurobolium and the Criobolium were familiar in many lands. Their essential idea is still a favorite one in many Christian circles.

> There is a fountain filled with blood
> Drawn from Emanuel's veins;
> And sinners plunged beneath that flood
> Lose all their guilty stains.

Baptism with water by which the subject was believed to be *renatus ad æternam,* born again to life eternal, the "mystical washing away of sin" was as common in the Gentile world as it is to-day in Christendom. The cross

has been a religious symbol from remotest antiquity. The idea of resurrection and immortality through union with a slain and revived god was a favorite conception of the world in which Jesus lived. And these ideas and practices come not from the "Old Dispensation" but from the Gentile world.

When these things which looked so like Christianity forced themselves on my attention they caused me the same irritation and bewilderment that they did to Tertullian long ago. At first the accounts seemed preposterous. If the alleged facts were so why had all my teachers been ignorant or regardless of them? If the things which I had always taken to be the *peculium* of Christianity had been in the world ages earlier, by what title could we claim them? At first I stubbornly refused to admit the facts. They were not facts but fantastic conceits flung together by men who are congenital iconoclasts, delighting to pull down what better men have built up. Or they were fabrications erected on slight foundations by ambitious archeologists. Thus I once more balked at the truth. For the most part the refusal to accept new truth is not so much that men do not see it to be truth as because its admission would oblige them to rearrange their mental furniture. They look at a new piece when presented, with interest, and may be with admiration, and would willingly possess it. But when they see that it would not fit in with what they already have, would oblige them to throw away some articles and readjust others, then, partly from laziness, and partly from old attachment, they turn away, saying, "The old is good enough."

But when I had once read Frazer's "Golden Bough," Cumont's "Mysteries of Mithra," followed by a whole literature of whose existence I had been ignorant, I found

this would not do. The facts were facts and must be admitted and dealt with. I could not gainsay that many at least of the doctrines, rites, ceremonies, and ideas which we call Christian were far older than Christ. They had sprung from a thousand sources, many of them from the dimmest and remotest past. Some appeared even to be coeval with primitive man. It is true that mythmongers have dressed up for their purposes many fantastic conceits. Still the facts are there. What was I to make of them? The naïve and ignorant early Christian Fathers could dismiss them, like the Jesuit missionaries did later, as devices of the devil for the confusion of the saints. It is too late for that method. Such phenomena as confronted me were actually part of the religion of the world at least a century before Christ.

CHAPTER XII

SURVIVALS IN CHRISTIANITY

THE fond attempt to account for all this pre-Christian Christianity as "types" and "unconscious prophecies" of a redeemer to come at a definite time of divine appointment seemed to me to be at once disingenuous and futile. These things had an actual present worth in themselves. They were, as is all religious activity, attempts to "seek after God if haply they might find him." And they did find him, in the only way by which he may be found, that is, in rest for their souls and satisfaction for those vague but insistent longings, part instinct and part reasoned hope, which are the fount and origin of all religion.

In the presence of these newly realized facts I found my preconceptions fading away. I had been taught to think that the line of divine revelation ran solely through the people Israel until it culminated in the great Son of David. All the phenomena of the great world outside were unrelated, isolated, disregarded, as phantoms flitting about in the obscurity of "heathen darkness." Now I realized how meager and unsatisfactory this conception was. It gave to the Jew a monopoly of God, a monopoly he has been ever eager to clutch, and whose self-satisfaction has been ministered to by Christianity since John made the tribal boast that "salvation is of the Jews." I began to see that our inheritance is far richer, more various and abundant than I had been accustomed to

believe. Even in religion we are the heirs of all the ages. In my previous reading of the Bible I had been totally unaware of all the phenomena I have been capitulating. Reading the New Testament again in the light of the information which the last half century has gathered and arranged, I was amazed to find how many of the ideas and how many of the events recorded were very old, in a new dress and setting.

I should say here that in all the instances which I have given and shall give I make no pretense to original research. That has been done by many skillful and honest hands. I only adduce facts within easy reach of verification by any one who will take the trouble to read. The literature of the subject is very copious and very accessible. Some of its findings are fanciful and speculative, and some preposterous, but its great body of established fact is sufficient. Among them may be capitulated such as these:

The belief in the birth of a divine person from a virgin mother has been held in every age and by countless and widely separated peoples from Judea to Persia and India and Peru and Polynesia. Parthenogenesis is as common in pagan as it is in Christian thought. To name only the most familiar, Athene, Demeter, Persephone, were all revered as "blessed virgins," as was the mother of the Buddha. The Virgo Cœlestis is one of the oldest conceptions in the history of religions. The Egyptian Isis with the child Horus on her knee was adored under the titles of "Our Lady," "Queen of Heaven," "Star of the East," "Mother of God." Statues of that mother and child still survive in southern Europe and are reverenced under the names of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Babe. The annunciation through an ancient woman relative, the birth of the God in a cave, the visit of the Wise Men, the Massacre of the Innocents, are all counterparts of popular

stories which had been familiar in religious circles for many ages. The birthday, December 25, was the same as that assigned to the savior-gods of Egypt, Assyria, Persia, and Phœnicia. Among the native people of Palestine it had been a common holiday. The temptation in the wilderness is parallel almost in detail to the story of the Buddha as well as in the Mithraic mysteries.

These parallelisms between the stories in the Gospels and the beliefs current at the time when they were written can be followed into innumerable details. But these are sufficient to show that the absolute originality we are in the habit of attributing to them is a delusion. We are compelled to see in the Gospels a chapter in the long history of the evolution of religion.

But it is after we leave the New Testament time and confront the church as it emerges from obscurity at the end of the second century that its startling resemblance to pre-Christian ethnic religion becomes manifest. Says Justin Martyr: "The evil demons in mockery have handed down that the same things should be done in the mysteries of Mithra. For as in these mysteries bread and a cup is set before the initiates, as you know." Kneeling as a posture of worship as was the church's custom was unknown among Romans and Jews, who worshiped with uplifted hands. The organization of the churches, the functions of the priest, the tonsure, the white linen robes, all these are derived not from the synagogue but from the heathen temple. The language of the church from the beginning and everywhere was Greek. But language is much more than a vehicle for the exchange of intelligence. It not only conveys thought, it molds and conserves it. The pentecostal legend envisages a profound truth; no one can hear a message of religion except "in his own tongue in which he was born."

The Greek language was itself saturated with religious conceptions. When its words were borrowed to express Christian thought they carried with them their old connotations. Thus we find that the church in the third and fourth centuries not only defines in a heathen tongue her doctrines, sacraments, rituals, and institutions, but also attaches the same ideas to the terms which they had formerly borne.

The going religion of the Mediterranean world in the century before Christ was a *Syncretism* composed of an incomplete fusion, or rather mosaic, of many creeds and cults which had been in use in many lands. There were countless temples to Apollo, to Dionysos, to Osiris and Isis, to Mithra. The striking fact is that all these creeds and cults were permeated by the same central idea, that of propitiatory sacrifice. But they had all developed beyond the stage where it was the literal "blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of an heifer," and had reached the stage where the sacrifice was symbolized in sacramental mysteries. It is noteworthy that they had outdistanced and passed contemporary Judaism. While the Gentiles had left their bloody rites behind them and were celebrating their sacraments in the kindly symbols of bread and wine, at Jerusalem the voice of prayer and thanksgiving was drowned by the lowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep, while priests paddled about pavements reeking with offal. A careful student of the time has formulated the beliefs which were common to the worshipers of the Gentile deities:—

"They were born of Virgin mothers.
"They led a life of toil or danger for mankind.
"They were vanquished by the powers of darkness and descended to the Underworld.

"They came back to life again and became pioneers of mankind to the heavenly world.

"They founded communities and churches into which the initiates were admitted by Baptism.

"They were commemorated by Eucharistic meals." [1]

These were the churches of the world into which Jesus was born and in which Paul lived. These mystery societies were everywhere, under many names, sodalities, guilds, colleges. Again and again the Roman authorities tried to suppress them, but always in vain. They were composed largely of slaves and freedmen. But this does not imply that their members were ignorant, unintelligent, or of low human quality. The Roman slave was usually far superior to his master in these qualities. In the first place, they were white, prisoners of war or captives from among peoples advanced in culture far beyond the Romans. They possessed accomplishments of which their owners were ignorant. From among them came the architects, physicians, artists, goldsmiths, experts in the culture of the vine and the olive. They were the rhetoricians and grammarians, and the profession of teaching was largely confided to them. It was from this type of folk that the membership of the church was composed. As they were chiefly of Eastern origin they brought with them the religious preconceptions of their homes. They had been robbed of home and fortune and obliged whether young or old to begin life over again.[2] For them these sodalities were a refuge and a home. But they had in their membership men and women of all ranks and position. They stood for a religion, a brotherhood, and a pure life. They demanded of the candidate for admission a confession of

[1] Edward Carpenter, "Pagan and Christian Christs."
[2] Ferarro, "Greatness and Decline of Rome."

sin. He was received by a baptism in which he was signed and sealed in the forehead. In looking at them it is hard for one to persuade himself that he is not looking at a picture of the early Christian churches.

I had always without thinking regarded Baptism as an institution peculiar to our religion. The most casual reading of the New Testament ought to have corrected this error. The earliest Gospel introduces Jesus at the time of his baptism by John. In doing so it takes for granted that the rite was one well known and needing no explanation. And so it was; but it was one which had no official place in Jewish institutions, while it was a common one in the other religions of the time. In the Pauline churches it was the common practice, though Paul himself seems to have regarded it slightingly, for he thanks God that he had baptized only two or three of the converts. In the Mithraic rites and those of Osiris it occupied a conspicuous place. In the latter rite, by the way, a dove was the symbol of the Holy Spirit. The whole range of ideas now associated with it were common then; water, consecrated to the mystical washing away of sin, buried with the Divinity, born again to eternal life, these same phrases we use to-day were familiar in the times before Cæsar Augustus.

I know well that when such facts are thus concretely and baldly stated they are likely to be received by the good Christian with a smile of incredulity or a frown of rebuke. But facts they remain. It is not necessary to quote authorities. Christian scholars have gathered and formulated them. They are plainly set forth in the accredited encyclopedias and books of reference. Any one who will may test and verify them. The important matter is to know what to do with them. Orthodoxy would prefer to have them buried and forgotten. This has always been so. When Christianity became the official religion

of the Empire not only was every Gentile religion ruthlessly repressed, rooted out and destroyed, but every record of their past was as far as possible eradicated. So late as the sixteenth century Sahagun, the devoted missionary priest, wrote an account of the religion which he found in Mexico. Besides recounting its superstitions and cruelties, he was honest enough to speak highly of some of its features. He described with great wonder and perplexity the surprising similarity of their dogmas and rites to the beliefs and sacraments of the church. The authorities of the Mission got hold of his manuscripts and concealed them. He appealed to the Spanish court and had them returned. When at eighty years of age, and fifty years a missionary, he translated them into Spanish and sent them home to Spain they immediately disappeared. Two hundred years later they were discovered in a convent at Tolosa and translated into English.

This sort of timidity and opposition is futile as well as wrong. If it should appear that Christianity is a stage in the long, continuous journey through which humanity has traveled in its search after God, I should feel all the more secure in my place as a late pilgrim. But I cannot be unmindful of all the pilgrims who have trod the path in every age and from every people. Not alone in the meager line of Abraham, but among the multitudinous Gentiles is the path to be traced. For the Church's Doctrine it leads through Greek philosophy; for its worship, through heathen rituals; for its late organization, through Roman law. The religious conceptions of the world into which Jesus was born have been summed up by Professor Harnack thus:

"1. There was the sharp division between the soul (spirit) and the body; the more or less exclusive impor-

tance attached to the spirit; and the notion that the spirit comes from other upper world and is either possessed or capable of life eternal.

"2. That there is a sharp division between God and the world.

"3. The depreciation of the world and that it was a prison, or at least a penitentiary of the spirit.

"4. The conviction that connection with the flesh, 'that soiled robe,' depreciated and stained the spirit; that the latter would be inevitably ruined unless the connection was broken or its influence counteracted.

"5. The yearning for redemption from the flesh, mortality, and death.

"6. That all redemption is to life eternal, and that it is dependent upon knowledge and expiation.

"7. The belief that knowledge cannot be adequate; it is the 'initiation,' the Mystery or Sacrament, which is combined with the impartation of knowledge by which alone the spirit is sustained, by which it is actually redeemed and delivered from the bondage of mortality and sin."

Here we have in the pagan world the whole range of religious conceptions afterward formulated by Paul and John, and current to this day in the Christian world.[1]

[1] Harnack, "Expansion of Christianity," p. 34.

CHAPTER XIII

CHRISTIANITY AND JESUS

Says Emerson in his "Exploratio": "The life of Jesus was the occasion and cause of an enormous development in the spiritual faculties and perceptions of men. He found us children in all that regards the hidden life and he left us men."

This was the estimate of him and his work which I had always taken to be the truth,—that it was the new Jerusalem suddenly let down from heaven four square and complete, upon the empty plain of earth. This conception could no longer hold its place. I had reluctantly adopted the doctrine of evolution, but I had embraced it completely. It involves much more than the ascent of man from the primordial slime. It is the law in science and history and must be religion also. Things do not come into being in this abrupt fashion. Miracles do not happen in history any more than they do in nature. No force ever breaks into the world instantly. The ascent of man is a long, slow, tortuous climb. Every advance is but a stage in a continuous process. It is true that from time to time humanity does appear to have taken a sudden leap to a mountain top from which opens a view so broad and all embracing that the slow steps and backward slipping through which it was gained are forgotten. But a careful backward look will always rediscover the mazy trail through which it arrived. This evolutionary generalization has now become a category of thought. All history

written before its prevalence is obsolete. All institutions must be accounted for and described under its guidance. A sudden incursion of a new and divine revelation would be a breach of evolutionary law, an intellectual and psychological miracle. It is impossible in the nature of things that the apparition of a single teacher could instantly bestow "subtlety of insight" to a race formely devoid of it, raising to manhood at once a humanity which had theretofore remained children, through ages of religious speculation and striving. The stupendous phenomena of Christianity may not be accounted for by a supposed catastrophic invasion of the world by a new and unrelated force or person. It is vastly easy so to explain it. In that way it presents to the intelligence a neatness and precision which makes it acceptable. A *deus ex machina* is the readiest of all devices. A miracle is the most convenient of all explanations. It is still generally accepted as the simple and obvious explanation of the rapid growth of the early church; indeed it is not long since any other explanation was denounced and its proponent frowned upon. At the time of my own theological studies the only reference to the matter was to abuse Gibbon for irreligion in attributing it to natural causes in his famous fifteenth chapter.

Here, then, is the problem, a new religion, originating, as is claimed, in the time of Tiberius Cæsar, appears a century later covering the whole earth. All experience has shown that in no area of human life does change take place so slowly as in religion. It is the most tenaciously conservtive of all things. Epochs do occur in it, but every advance comes like the revival of vegetation in the spring. The blossoms and flowers and budding fruit are new, but the roots are deep in the ground, and the seed was scattered the year before. What is manifestly true of the epochs within Christianity is equally true of Christianity

itself. It is not the sudden growth and efflorescence of a new and strange seed fallen to earth from regions above, but the ripening of a harvest of vegetation sprung from a thousand seeds. To pursue the figure, earth's living forms present amazingly different aspects at different epochs, once that of monsters weltering in the slime, and again the fair earth of to-day with man as its crown. But every intervening stage is but a slow modification of the one which preceded it.

The accepted belief that it sprang from Judaism is utterly indefensible. Both as to its outward form and inward spirit it is the very antithesis of the Hebrew spirit and the Hebrew institutions. This delusion has handicapped its progress and obscured its history from Paul's time till now. It fastened upon it the fardel of the Hebrew Scriptures with their falsified history and their "jealous" God, their savage moral ideals, their unintelligible vaticinations. Of course Hebrew literature contains passages of spiritual elevation and deep insight; every literature does. But its acceptance as authoritative in religion has confused and hampered the church in every age. Its few noble psalms and the scattered golden nuggets among its prophets cannot qualify it for the place which it has usurped. This place would never have been allowed to it but for the notion foisted upon the church that it was the husk within which the precious kernel grew and ripened. So far from its being a "progressive revelation of God," that revelation and discovery took place quite outside of it.

When I had become convinced that our religion in its essential features long antedated the birth of Christ the question arose, How and when did the historic Jesus come into it, and what is his real place in it?

Earliest in point of time is that congeries of beliefs

derived from the religions of the East. Their center is the idea of a dying and restored "Savior-God," an advent, a death and a restoration. Its primeval notion was that redemption is attained by the individual through eating the body of the divinity incarnated in a human sacrifice. The cannibal feast, which was originally a religious rite, had long been succeeded by one in which the sacrifice was represented by a sacred animal. This in turn gave place to the gentler "Mysteries" in which the fruits of the earth became sacrificial symbols. But the fundamental idea was never lost, of a sacrificed Divinity, and of union with him through sacraments. This is the outstanding feature of Christianity to-day. All sects and divisions of Christians hold the sacraments to be the center of the cult. About these have raged all the controversies. Upon their significance has depended the value of all dogmas. The priesthood or the ministry is evaluated according to their definition. They are the supreme act of worship. The whole plan of salvation is represented in them—cleansing from sin by sacramental washing in water, union with sacrificed Divinity through eating his flesh and drinking his blood. These conceptions have been the earliest, the most continuous and the most permanent things in Christianity.

But not one of these things can be traced to Jesus. They prevailed long before his time and far beyond his influence. It seems now fairly well settled that even the Eucharist was not established by him.[1] The original authority in the New Testament is Paul, and he alleges that the account of the institution was "revealed" to him. It has the same historic value as his vision on the way to Damascus, no less, no more. The whole circle of ideas which have the sacraments as their center are altogether foreign to the

[1] M'Giffert, "Apostolic Age," p. 68; Cone, "Gospel and Its Earliest Interpreters," p. 175.

teaching and practice of Jesus as portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels. He never brought so much as a turtle dove to the temple. When, as a youth, he was brought there, he showed no reverence for its cult and spent his time disputing with the elders. He has never a good word for priest or Levite. He tells the Samaritan woman that true worship of God who is a spirit is neither to be confined to her sacred mountain or to Jerusalem. He baptized no one, and submitted to the rite himself not because he valued it, but as a becoming thing. It is true that the three Gospels represent him as establishing the Eucharist with its characteristics of eating flesh and drinking blood, but the identical terms used by all show plainly that the stories had all been borrowed from a common source. Moreover, it cannot be made to accord with the course of the incidents of his last days, or with the tenor of his life.

Nevertheless, from the time when the church emerged from obscurity at the end of the second century the central feature has been the Eucharist. It represents the broken body and shed blood of a sacrificed Divinity. Redemption is by blood. The creeds are but statements of the worth and value of the divine Victim. Upon this foundation rests the whole towering edifice of doctrines, confessions, liturgies, cathedrals, papacies. Music and art have poured out their richest treasures for it. Inquisitors have persecuted for it, and martyrs have bled and burned for believing it and for denying it. Browning's old monk voiced the devotion of myriads when he begged to be buried in old St. Praexed's where

> He could hear the blessed mutter of the Mass
> And see God made and eaten every day.

It is true that in late centuries the Protestant world has shrunk away from the grosser conceptions of the sac-

raments. It has tended to vaporize them into symbols and memorials. But in its official standards the original conceptions are stated without qualification. The definition of sacraments is substantially the same in the Presbyterian Confession of Faith, the Decrees of the Council of Trent, and the standards of the churches of England and Germany. It is to be noted, moreover, that those Christian societies which eliminate sacrificial ideas, such as Unitarians, Quakers, and Liberals, show but a meager vitality, dwindle, evaporate, and are passed by by the multitude. The tragic element in human nature does not find satisfaction in them. So far as organized Christianity is concerned it may truly be said that the sacrificial idea and cult have been its organizing principle. It was so, is now, and so far as one can see, always will be so.

In the pathetic attempts now being made to bring about "church union" this is the crux. Dogmas and priesthoods and ministries all revolve about it. Committees of "Faith and Order," i.e., doctrine and organization, exchange diplomatic protocols and search for formulas—not too unambiguous—concerning the sacraments and priesthood. A true instinct tells them that this is the central point of all. Many good people express wonder that all cannot unite and become one in the religion of Jesus. But the ecclesiastical instinct is right. If solidity of organization and continuity of existence is the thing sought it is through the mysteries alone that it can be found. Here is the real apostolic succession. It reaches backward through all the Christian centuries, back through the heathen cults of Asia and Egypt, back through all the ages and involving all the peoples of earth. Called by the name of Moses or Mithra or Buddha or Christ it has always been the same; redemption by sacrificial blood and union with Divinity by sacramental symbols.

CHAPTER XIV

JESUS AND CHRIST

What is the rôle of Jesus in this ecumenical religion? Here is an historical problem whose solution seems insoluble with the data available. How did Jesus come to be identified with the savior-gods of the peoples, to merge them all in his person, to leave them all behind, mere mummified curiosities from the forgotten past? This transmutation took place during that century where our information is so scant as to be almost nil. Yet the general course can be traced. The molds in which that plastic religiosity of the time was poured were all ready. First in point of time was the identification of Jesus with the Hebrew Messiah. But this could be effected only after that had become transformed through Gentile influence. What the true Jew always had in mind was a conqueror like a sublimated David in whom would be embodied their arrogant conceit that the people Israel should put their foot on the neck of kings. Their dispersion and the destruction of their nation and temple compelled a modification of their expectations. As their tribal fortunes became more and more hopeless they began to dream of a "suffering Messiah" who would redeem Israel. Their hope of world dominion waned and they became ready to seek salvation like the Gentiles. The Hebrew Messiah became the Greek Christ. In this form it came in contact with the pagan world. The kingly Messiah became the sacrificial Victim, and

in this form found itself at home among the peoples whose familiar ideas and practices corresponded thereto. Thus the Jew entered into world-religion. He brought with him his sacred books, his materialistic ideas, his proselyting zeal, his instinct of superiority.

It is possible that Jesus did at times believe himself to be the Messiah. But it is clear from the Synoptic Gospels that this fancy was not permanent nor was it the controlling element in his life. Here again it is essential, as it is difficult, to guard oneself in reading the first three Gospels against notions thrown backward upon them from the theological fiction which we call the Gospel by John. Whatever value that may have for devotion it has less than none for history. It is impossible to know with anything like certainty what Jesus' conception of the Messiah was at the moments when he identified himself with it. It was not till long after his death and the removal of his followers from Jewish environment that any coherent attempt was made to define his nature and function. It is impossible to do more than to catch glimpses of the real Jesus through the clouds of miracle and prodigy with which the Gospels surround him. Through this cloud, at once murky and radiant, one can discern a real person and form a general idea of his person and career. A striking feature is his continuous struggle against the grandiose rôle which his followers pressed upon him. The suggestion that he might be the Messiah did not originate with him. At the height of his popularity he once asked his disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?" They answered, "Some say that you are John the Baptist redivivus, some say 'that Prophet.' some say Elias." One enthusiastic member said, "You are the Christ." His response is noteworthy, "See that you do not say that to any man." Did he mean to disclaim the rôle altogether? Did he ac-

cept it but pronounce its proclamation untimely? It is impossible to discover what he thought at that time. When he was adjured—very reasonably as it would seem—"if you be the Christ tell us plainly," he evaded the question. But there can be no doubt that as he went on he more and more claimed for himself some character superior to that of ordinary humanity. His favorite title for himself was "the Son of Man." No one has ever known certainly what he meant by the term. The passages in which he arrogates to himself as Son of Man the function of judge of all men, and says that his followers will see him come in the clouds of heaven to preside at the last assizes, may have been spoken by him, or they may with equal probability be put in his mouth by the generation after his death who held all earthly things in contempt while they waited the end of all things. But in the mood of exaltation which marked the closing months of his life he certainly believed himself to be something more and greater than man. Just what that was can never be known. It cannot be gathered from the New Testament or deduced from all the writers of the century and a half after his death. The pseudo-scientific definitions of his person and nature by the theologasters of the third and fourth centuries have been thrown backward upon him for so long a time that in the popular mind they are taken to be the facts of his own consciousness. In any attempt at an independent study of Jesus one is hampered and frustrated at every step by these theological figments which thrust themselves forward as biographical truth.

The inchoate Christology of the New Testament is not the source of "the Christ" of Christendom. All it furnishes is the title, together with an ill defined but exalted conception of a Divinity somewhere in an undefined position between man and God. The Christ of popular

belief is in the main the creation of two men neither of whom had ever seen Jesus. Both were Jews of the Dispersion. Paul had been born and reared at Tarsus in Roman Asia, a city devoted to the Mithra cult. John was from Ephesus, a center of Greek philosophy. These two are the architects of the popular creed. Jesus is indeed a stone in its corner, but the architecture is Pagan-Jewish composite. Paul seized the Jewish Messiah, bore him away from Judea, and set him down among the savior-gods of the Gentiles. John brought to him the philosophical robe which had been spun in Greece and Alexandria, endued him with it and called him the "Word." Heathen religion united to heathen philosophy took the Hebrew Messiah and made of him the world's Christ. The real cradle of Christianity is to be sought not in Bethlehem of Judea but in the cities of Egypt and Asia Minor. It grew there easily and naturally under the conditions existing.

Says Arnold Meyer: "The belief in propitiation by blood dominated the whole Jewish and Gentile world." Dr. Hatch notes that "the mysteries and the religious societies which were akin to the mysteries existed on an enormous scale throughout the eastern part of the Empire. The majority of them had the aim of worshiping a pure God, of living a pure life, of cultivating the spirit of brotherhood. They were part of the great religious revival which distinguished the age." A curious glimpse of such a society is afforded in the eighteenth chapter of the Acts. Apolos, an Alexandrian Jew, comes to Ephesus representing a group who knew something about Jesus, but had never heard of the new church which Paul and his friends were propagating. These associations had their sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Both in idea, form and manner these sacraments continue in the church

to-day. The primitive name of Baptism, "enlightenment," comes straight from the Greek mysteries, as does the sign and seal on the forehead. The baptized were crowned with garlands like the "initiates" at Eleusis, a custom continued in oriental churches till a time within the memory of men now living. As those admitted had a password, a "symbol," so did the candidates for Christian Baptism. The Eucharist was the Gentile mystery with the name of Christ replacing the diverse savior-gods. In its fundamental meaning, its technical phraseology, its rubrics, its bread and wine transmuted into the body and blood of Christ, in the priestly quality of its celebrants, it hardly changed at all in becoming a Christian rite. The canon of the Mass or the Office for the Holy Communion could have been used by the devout inhabitants of Tarsus or Ephesus with satisfaction. The new religion was still the old. Its fundamental properties were an incarnation, the sacrifice of the incarnate one, initiation into his society by washing in consecrated water which cleansed from sin and conferred immortality, the new life nourished and sustained by the flesh and blood of the God. The historic Jesus became the Greek Logos, the Eternal Son took the place of the savior-god.

I do not forget there are multitudes of Christians who fancy that they can get on quite well without either sacraments or definite creeds. Ever since the Evangelical movement of a hundred and fifty years ago among English-speaking people of the Protestant world there has been a steady and accelerated movement away from Catholic doctrine and rite. It is not that they deny the reality of these things, but they deem them practically superfluous. The Evangelical places the whole weight of emphasis on "conversion" and does not consider either creed or sacrament essential to that end. And in truth it is not. Con-

version is a psychological-emotional phenomenon which has no necessary connection with religion at all. Nevertheless, the revivalist always associates it with the creed of the ages, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." He assures the inquirer that "Jesus has paid the price." He holds up Christ, the bleeding Victim, and assures the believer that he has only to accept and enjoy the redemption so dearly bought. To him the creeds and sacraments are an embarrassment. He does not know what to do with them. He accords them a half-hearted reverence, and neglects them as much as he decently can. But he holds all the more strenuously to the belief in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. This is generally represented to be the foundation of the Christian faith. Does it truly represent the purpose and work of that strange life of Jesus?

CHAPTER XV

THE SCAPEGOAT

The historical fact is that Jesus was put to death as a malefactor. The times were cruel and it so happened that the manner of his execution was by crucifixion. It took place on a bald, round hill outside the city of Jerusalem. To a visitor at the Judean town the sight would have had nothing worthy of note. He would scarcely have singled it out for notice from among the hundreds of crosses upon which he had seen men writhing during his travels. Had he inquired specially about this offender he would have been told that he had been a rather interesting and probably quite harmless man, a dreaming Jew who had proclaimed a new social and political order and had gathered about himself a considerable following. It was a pity he had to be taken seriously, indeed the Roman governor had tried to save him from the consequences of his own indiscretions, but then, you know, the laws against sedition are very stringent and none of these laws take any account of motives, and so the poor man blundered into his fate. It is a pity. Thus the official world would have answered.

The religious world explained that he was a very pestilent and dangerous fellow. He was utterly without reverence, jested at our most hallowed and venerable institutions, spoke scurrilous abuse of priests and dignitaries, held and taught loose notions about God and religion, broke the holy Sabbath, told the rabble that harlots and tax farmers were more worthy people than magistrates or clerics. He was a dangerous demagogue, all the more dangerous

because of his strangely attractive personality and the diabolical charm of his speech. Something had to be done with him. It was better that he should be put out of the way than that the whole people be jeopardized. He was leading them to anarchy, sedition and rebellion. He simply came to the end which such men always reach.

The crowd seething around the spear-points which guarded the bloody square mocked at him and shouted that he was an exposed fraud and impostor, that he had deluded them with glittering promises about a new Kingdom in which there would be no rich and no poor, where all would share and share alike, a kingdom the least of whose citizens would sit on thrones, in which every sick and ailing one would have his ills cured by magic, where would be no oppression, poverty, or toil.

A few timid and terrified friends looked on from a safe distance broken-hearted. Here was the truest and noblest man they had ever known or imagined. He had steadfastly set his face toward right and goodness, he had told the truth to priest and publican alike, he had led his friends near to God, his speech had been the speech of an angel, he had been pure and sweet and lovable beyond telling, they had even hoped that he should redeem Israel, but somehow he had managed to excite the hostility of the powers, he had been injudicious and careless of offending, he had said things about himself which when misinterpreted had the color of blasphemy. Now all these hateful forces had closed about him and brought to an ignominious and horrible end. And they looked him a despairing and final farewell.

This is what the spectators saw, and it was all they saw, a middle-aged man being crucified. When he was dead they went their way.

But for centuries myriads of eyes have seen, or believe

that they have discerned in the tragedy something which was not visible to the lookers-on. In their belief the cross has been transformed into an altar, the crucified man has become the Divine Victim, the soldier with bloody spear has become all unconsciously a great High Priest, the gushing blood has been etherealized into smoke of incense ascending to the gratified nostrils of an angry God, the turbulent crowd have become unwittingly the possible beneficiaries of a great sacrifice offered once for all under the dome of heaven for the sins of the world.

Now, may this event in history be rightly so construed? Is this the true interpretation of the tragedy? If not, what will account for the ghastly fiction? If this explanation be not true we must reject the most widely current and generally accepted notions about Christ. I say accepted, rather than believed, for when the notion is stated in terms with which the understanding can deal its intrinsic incoherence and its ethical monstrosity compel its rejection. Nevertheless it remains as one of those idols of the imagination before which generations have prostrated themselves, and whose grim hideousness is hidden from the devotees by the smoke of their own incense. Most Christians would be likely to aver that underlying all their doctrinal and ecclesiastical differences they are at one in what they would call their fundamental belief that the crucified Jesus was a sacrifice to placate an offended God, and that it has been so far efficacious as to leave God no valid grievance against any one who takes the proper steps to interpose this satisfaction between himself and punishment.

> O tree of glory, tree most fair,
> Ordained those holy limbs to bear,
> How bright in purple robe it stood,
> The purple of a Saviour's blood!

Upon its arm, like balance true,
He weighed the price from sinners due,
The price which he alone could pay,
And robbed the spoiler of his prey.

This is the burden of the Roman Mass, the Hallelujah lasses' exhortations, the cult of the Sacred Heart. It is the gloomy theme of ecclesiastical art, is enshrined in a myriad pyxes, is what the wayfaring man takes to be the central article of the Christian creed. It holds the central place in the accredited formularies in the largest divisions of the Church.

The Roman Church says, "It was a sacrifice most acceptable to God, offered by his Son on the altar of the cross, which entirely appeased the wrath and indignation of the Father."

The Greek Church says, "He has done and suffered all that is necessary for the remission of our sins."

The Presbyterian Confession of Faith says, "The Lord Jesus, by his sacrifice of himself hath fully satisfied the justice of the Father, and hath purchased reconciliation for all whom his Father hath given him."

The two conceptions the dogma rests upon are: appeasement of an angry God by pain, and the substitution of a victim in the room of an offender. A notable tendency in modern times is the attempt to retain the terms of the doctrine while emptying it of its content. It has begun to be realized in many quarters that its moral estimate of God and its ethical judgment of men are unworthy, so the sacrosanct thing called "sacrifice" is saved by giving it an exalted and unnatural meaning. This cannot be allowed. It has been held before the world for ages as the true interpretation of the work of Jesus. If it be not true it ought to be cast out of the holy place. Propitiation of God by sacrifice, and the transfer of

righteousness from the guilty to the innocent are of the very essence of it. But these are both survivals from the most ancient paganism. Even the Gentile cults of the time of Augustus had outgrown them. To outroot them was the purpose of Jesus and the prophets. Judaism failed and perished from clinging stubbornly to this idolatry. Christianity has been saved so far because it has always had at work within it another conception of the Christ which has been its real dynamic. But the time ought not to be distant when his work in the world will be interpreted in terms and images freed from the taint of outgrown savagery.

Propitiatory sacrifice belongs at a stage of evolution through which all peoples pass. At that state God and the devil are one. If they are hostile they can be bribed; if they are angry they can be appeased by presents; or when one is guilty and afraid he can put some one else in his place and slip away. It has been a fond device of theology to interpret these savage customs as "unconscious prophecies," as shadows of the Great Sacrifice cast backward along the pathway of human history by the true cross. Especially is this claimed for the bloody rites of the people Israel. This claim is utterly without foundation. These phenomena are coming to be understood, and to have a value of their own, but this is because they are seen to be the natural and spontaneous expression of devotion at a certain stage of evolution. They bear the same relation to the religion of Jesus as the moralities of the savage do to his. To interpret him in terms of primitive cult is to shut up the sun of righteousness in troglodytic caves. The history of Israel is as simple as it is melancholy. The prophet and the priest strove together; finally the voice of the prophet ceased and the priest remained in possession. Five centuries later that system, which was

not of Moses but elaborated in pagan Babylon, was set up in all its gorgeous barbarity, and from that time the decline of the people became inevitable. Religion remained for them the placation of God by gifts; holiness was a ceremonial cleanliness without moral quality. The prophet cried in vain his "Thus saith the Lord, what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? I am surfeited with the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of beasts and I delight not in the blood of bullocks or lambs or he goats." It was a religion of the shamble, and the medicine-men. Jesus' counsel was to bury it out of sight.

And yet within three centuries of his death we find this ancient idol enthroned on the altar of the Christian church.

When I began to preach fifty years ago I believed myself to be an ambassador commissioned to offer men salvation through the blood of Christ. I told them they were living under a sentence of condemnation and unless they embraced this way to escape their doom was inevitable. That escape was possible only by securing an interest in the equivalent which Jesus had paid to satisfy the justice of God. This was my message. I had not begun to question its genuineness. But presently I wondered why my preaching and that of my contemporaries had so little effect. Did we really believe what we said? And did the people believe it when we said it? Time was when they did believe, and tremble; why not now? Most Christian ministers will confess, if they be candid, that it is increasingly difficult to get a hearing for their message. Even thirty years ago their churches were well filled and their message listened to, without much enthusiasm, but without impatience. Every year their hearers and their influence grow less and less. I know of course that from published statistics of church growth one might be convinced that all is well, but every minister knows

better. He knows that thrice the labor and energy are needed for success now than was the case thirty years ago. He knows also that those most difficult to win are the good men rather than the bad ones. The late Professor Bruce, whose orthodoxy none will question, has left on record these strange words, "I am disposed to think that a great and increasing portion of the moral worth of society lies outside the Christian Church, separated from it not by godlessness but rather by exceptional earnestness. Many, in fact, have left the church in order to be Christians." General Booth in his last days confessed that the philanthropic work of the Salvation Army had practically replaced the religious purpose for which it had been founded.

The reasons usually assigned for this arrest in the church's growth are such as the enormous increase in material progress, the bewildering advance in human knowledge, the multiplication of provisions for pleasure and travel, the domination of the physical sciences, the shallow nature of the masses, and such like. But over against these are to be set the facts that the intellectual activity and skepticism of to-day are probably far less than that of the world to which the apostles preached; that the luxury and self-indulgence which encompass the church are not a circumstance compared with the time of Tiberius. But there is this difference; Christianity commanded the consent of all men for its moral ideals. This remained true for it for centuries after the bleeding Christ had become its symbol. Low and unworthy as was the plan of salvation offered to Gauls and Franks, Lombards and Saxons, it was still above the ethical standards of their own religions. No people has been converted to Christianity for a thousand years. There are many explanations of this, but there is one which the Christian man cannot contemplate without pain. It is that the

moral ideals of society have overtaken and passed beyond those of the church. Endless labor has been expended to remove intellectual difficulties out of the way, but it is time to be reminded that the obstacle is not intellectual but moral. Not unworthy Christians but an unworthy Christ is the stumblingblock. The dogma of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, which is still offered as the central truth, is rejected by a society whose moral sense has outgrown it. It is true that it is slurred over and euphemized by the pulpit. The minister spends his time preaching righteousness and temperance. His appeal to the community is for aid to social betterment, implying that "doctrinal" things may be disregarded. They take him at his word and follow him in all his philanthropic enterprises—until they come to the door of the church, and there they stop. In spite of all his camouflaging of doctrine they know very well that once entered, they will be expected to join in hymns and creeds and liturgies against which their moral sense relucts.

The truth is, the church is widely believed to be dishonest. The clergy are gravely suspected of preaching dogmas which they do not believe, or believe in an artificial and disingenuous way. Where they are unquestionably honest, they are regarded as rather foolish. Matthew Arnold said their besetting fault was want of seriousness, by which he meant, partly their habit of using words and phrases without seriously weighing their meaning, and partly their habit of spending their time upon things and questions which seem paltry to sensible men.

The whole scheme and so-called "plan of salvation" is unbelievable by men of to-day. It is not so much the formulated creeds they balk at as the theory of religion which underlies them. They do not believe that human nature is but the wreck and débris of Edenic man. When

they are told at baptism that all men are conceived and born in sin and that they who are in the flesh cannot please God, they know that the words on the face of them are not true. They have no interest in the theological exposition of the terms. They know that guilt is not hereditary in any sense, though they know well that sin is. They believe that the law against the attainder of blood is written in the constitution of the universe. They do not believe that justice can ever accept the innocent in place of the guilty, however willing the innocent may be. At a certain stage of moral development Zaleucus, king of the Locrians, could be admired. His law provided that the adulterer should lose his eyes. When his own son was convicted his father, to save the sanctity of law and allow his love to act at the same time, commanded that one of his own eyes and one of his son's should be put out. The world of that day looked upon Zaleucus as a miracle of goodness. The world of to-day can see in him only a fond and feeble tyrant.

The well-meant attempt to find analogies for the theory in the experiences of life is rejected by the intelligence and the conscience. Every one knows that the good are always suffering with and for the bad, but they know also that this suffering does not lessen, but augments, the blameworthiness of the evil ones who would profit by it. Every martyr of a holy cause sacrifices himself voluntarily, but who could believe that his pain could render guiltless those who stone him or those who share his goods? The mother starves herself that her children may eat; the merchant pays his friend's debts to save his good name; the engineer goes down to death with his hand on the reverse lever to save the passengers' lives; but none of these has any quality in common with the interpretation of Christ's suffering. In none of these is there any

thing like the transference of moral worth. They are indeed included in that eternal cross-bearing which is the concomitant of loving, but they have nothing in common with a victim bound upon an altar and slain to appease God.

It will not avail to be told that the doctrine of the Atonement which I have set forth is a caricature or misrepresentation. Nor will it suffice to say with an archbishop that "so far as it has any plausibility it rests on the impassioned language of the pulpit and the hymn book." Even if this were so, it must be remembered that the pulpit and the hymn book are the accredited vehicles upon which religious teaching is chiefly borne to the people. No; what the archbishop calls "this reversion to the worst ideas of pagan sacrifice, savoring of the heathen temples and reeking of blood," is woven into the very fabric of confessions, articles, and liturgies. Most distressing of all it is defended in set terms by scientific theology. Lately a volume was put forth in defense of the Faith by a group of the most learned and representative divines of the Church of England. Its article on the Atonement is a reasoned defense of the principle of vicarious sacrifice, and finds the justification of it in the Levitical system! "There it is divinely ordered, clearly necessary and profoundly significant, pointing to and foreshadowing the perfect expiation. The death of Christ is the expiation of those past sins which have laid the burden of guilt on the human soul, is also the propitiation of the wrath of God." [1]

My brethren with whom I sometimes talked about these things appeared to me strangely unaffected by the logic of the situation. It seemed as though they had never considered the implications of the conventional language

[1] "Lux Mundi," Article "Atonement."

they used. When their language was translated into the speech of everyday life they could but admit its monstrosity, but they did not appear to understand that while it was true to them only as a necessary part of a coherent system, to the ordinary man it was understood as a statement of actual truth.

Did Jesus conceive of himself as a propitiatory sacrifice, or his work as an expiation? He certainly did not. With the exception of two phrases put in his mouth years after his death there is no indication that such a thought ever entered his mind, and there is everything in his life to show that the whole circle of ideas in which the conception is embedded was abhorrent to him. If he had thought that the express purpose of his being was to propitiate an angry God by means of a painful death surely he would somewhere have said so. He speaks much about himself, so much that it was the chief ground of his offending. He presents himself and his mission in every form which, as it seemed to him, would throw light upon it. He calls himself a Light, to reveal God and illuminate the dark places of life; a Shepherd, leading a flock, guarding it against rapacious beasts, feeding it and gathering the mavericks; as Bread, for the soul's hunger; as Water, for the soul's thirst; as Leaven, to stir a ferment in the world's sodden life; as Salt, to keep life wholesome and prevent its decay; as a Physician, diagnosing the ills of men and laying balm on their sores; as the Vine, the Door, the Strong Man, the Bridegroom, but he never calls himself the world's Victim or the world's Priest.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RELIGION OF ALL SENSIBLE MEN

The story goes that an inquisitive person once asked Disraeli, the Christian Jew, what was his real religion. He replied, "The religion of all sensible men." And what is that? "Sensible men never say."

Sometimes they do say. There is a curious instinct by which men discover and recognize each other. Though I supposed I had kept to myself my doubts and defeasance of belief I found people whom I had thought unbelievers opening their hearts to me as though they felt sure of my sympathy and understanding. I was sometimes pleasantly twitted by my brethren that I had gathered a congregation of educated agnostics. I had; but I had done so unconsciously. Moreover, I observed that the regular, orthodox believers were quietly slipping away. I had, as I thought, been careful not to attack their beliefs or offend their prejudices, but they knew. There was something lacking for them in my ministrations and they went where the want could be supplied. In this situation I was brought more and more into relations with that class of people who are the despair of the church. They are so good that the church cannot see why they do not become better by joining her. The warfare of science and religion is over, they say, what now keeps you out? But they hold aloof. A great and increasing number of the best and most intelligent men turn silently away from the churches. They are not irreligious; indeed, judged by any fair test of life,

they are of the best among us. We can count them by the dozen among our acquaintances. Many of them used to go to church; they do not now.

Twenty years ago John Burroughs said,

"The religious skeptics to-day are a very large class, and are among the most hopeful, intelligent, upright and patriotic of our citizens. Let us see; probably four fifths of the literary men, a large proportion of journalists and editors, more than half the doctors, a large percentage of the teachers and business men. They find the creeds in which they were reared incredible."

This was true twenty years ago; it is more true now. A still more sinister fact is that of the youths and young men who join the church at their aspiring age a very large proportion drop out in middle life, and so far as one can see, without any moral deterioration. If we can induce such men to speak at all on the subject they will say something like this:

"We are not unappreciative of the church's solicitude concerning us. We would willingly join with her in all good works; nor are we indifferent to the obligations of religion. We are not without one. We face the deep mysteries of existence and destiny seriously. We endeavor to do our duty; we try to help our fellow men; we believe in God; we bow in reverence before the person of Jesus Christ as we understand him; but we cannot join the church. Let us frankly state some of our reasons: First, we do not believe to be true many of the things which such action on our parts would endorse. We do not believe that all mankind descended from Adam; that this man sinned; that all his posterity are sinners by inheritance of his nature or transmission of his guilt; that the man Jesus was the incarnation of God; that he was a divine Victim sacrificed to redeem humanity; that sal-

vation is contingent upon "accepting" this way of salvation; or in many of the secondary doctrines which follow from these. We have no interest in these dogmas. Nor can we see that they have any necessary connection with the actual religion of all good men in all ages. Strictly speaking, we do not know whether the things asserted in the creeds are true or not. We neither believe nor disbelieve them. They seem to us to be human speech applied in a region where words have no meaning.

"But our chief obstacle is a more practical and a more impassable one inasmuch as it concerns the eternal distinction of right and wrong. We would not be offensive, but we think that the very central tenet of the church's teaching is profoundly immoral. Atonement, Redemption, Propitiation, all these conceptions we believe belong to a low and savage stage of evolution. We hope and humbly believe that our moral sense is too far developed to allow us to traffic with them. Moreover, we believe they misrepresent and defeat the purpose of Jesus. We would rather be with Simon the Cyrenean, helping to bear the world's cross along life's *via dolorosa* than to hang upon it like lazy lurdans, adding to its weight, while we sing, 'Simply to thy cross we cling.' For these reasons, therefore, because our reason and our conscience cannot consent, we must decline your invitation."

Now, sympathizing so largely as I do, why should not I myself step out from the church, join this company, try to organize them on the basis of the "religion of all Sensible Men," disregard all obsolete dogmas, dismiss the mass of miracles, purge liturgies and hymn books of "blood," preach salvation by character instead of by grace? Or why not cast in my lot with such organizations already in existence, the Unitarians, the Ethical Culture people? This would seem the obvious thing to do, were it not for the fact that wherever this ecclesiastical

policy has been followed it has failed. It has offended and alienated those within the orthodox churches, and has attracted few from outside. The so-called "liberal churches," inspired as they are by sweet reasonableness and filled as they are by noble souls, have made practically no impression. For, after all, the satisfaction of the religious need is not to be found in sweet reasonableness. Why is it that the Catholic Mass and Billy Sunday's tabernacle grip as they do? They are in their message identical though seemingly so unlike; both being the exhibition of the same idea of "expiation" expressed in the baldest terms, acceptance by faith of wonders which the intelligence rejects, trust for salvation to a goodness which is not one's own but imputed to his credit. We are perplexed when we see intelligent men kneeling in awe and adoration at the Mass. We are amazed and depressed when we see throngs of reasonable people flocking to hear a mountebank evangelist hold forth in terms which reason retches at. But there it is. These are the places where men are to be found when the religious emotion stirs within them.

The truth is we are here confronted with one of those perplexing and exasperating antinomies of human nature. The intelligence is forever summoning before her bar the religious instinct, and the instinct pays no heed to the summons. It mocks at logic. It beckons, drives, promises, threatens, and comforts without the least thought of consistency. Is there any way by which the intelligent man and the religious man, or rather the religion and the intelligence in man, can get together? All churches agree that they rest upon the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The good men outside are eager to declare their reverence for the same incomparable personality. It is too much to expect, on the one hand, that they can ever subscribe to the interpretation of that life which has been formulated

in the Creeds. It is too much to expect, on the other hand, that the churches can renounce those dogmas which are entangled in their very structure, the molds in which their devotional life is run and which are hallowed by a myriad sacred associations. The *rapprochement* cannot be reached by a surrender of intellectual integrity, on the one hand, or of venerable creeds, on the other. What then? Is it not possible for the church to announce formally and officially, in a way which honorable men could not misunderstand, that membership in her body does not imply and is not meant to imply, a subscription to doctrines, and to rearrange her regulations to conform to the statement? Even so, the class I have in mind would not find life easy in the church at once, but, being the sensible men they are, could and would unite with her in the activities of the Christian life, and wait for the time to come when the church's atmosphere would clear itself of the vapors which cling to it from primeval paganism and theological conceit.

But whether they would or not, two things are clear: first, the life of religion among men cannot exist securely and permanently without being organized into a church; and, second, no new church can be organized successfully apart from the great world-church which now occupies the ground. It is a constant matter for wonder that the so-called "liberal" churches, like the Unitarian, for instance, do not grow. One would think the good men outside the church would flock eagerly to such a society. It offers them apparently all the advantages of a church without its doctrinal barriers. In it they could attack the evils of life and society more effectively than in individual isolation. There they could find spiritual companionship. If they are, as they say, kept out of the church by doctrinal barriers, here is a rallying place where no dog-

matic obstacle hinders. But they remain for the most part unmoved. They are not conscious of any peril from the outside to drive them in, or of any charm inside to draw them. They do not find there what they want. What do they want?

In religion the "herd instinct" is among the most potent of impulses. A church must have mass; and it must have history. This is why the Christian church as it is, even though sorely let and hindered by its unhappy divisions, may well hold all rivalry in contempt. It is too big to allow place for any other. It is also venerable. It has gathered into it and around it such store of association, history, poetry, and sacred association, of conquest and devotion as no extemporized associations can compete with. The story of the Babe of Bethlehem, the chorus of the angels, the weird figures of the Magi, the Christmas star, the lowly manger, the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimitis,* the *Mater Dolorosa* at the cross, the amazed Mary at the tomb, call these what you will, legend, fiction, myth, the world has so taken them into its imagination and its heart that nothing could replace them. The "Religion of all Sensible Men" cannot be organized into a church. Its defect is that it is too sensible. It offers no satisfaction to the emotions. It makes no appeal to the tragic element of life. Sacraments and hymns have no place in it. But religion in all ages has been, and always will be, sacramental and emotional. If I cannot live in the church which now is I cannot live in any.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PERSONAL PROBLEM

When I had become convinced that the origins of Christianity were substantially as I have sketched above, and that some of the major doctrines of the church were intellectually incredible and morally unworthy, the question confronted me, Can I continue in the ministry?

Probably a majority would answer at once, No, of course not. They would answer so because of the widespread notion that the prime function of the church is to propagate truth in the form of doctrine. Ever since the middle of the third century subscription to a creed has been held the condition of admission. As soon as this was done came the contentions and divisions which have continued since. Indeed these contentions over doctrines began much earlier. Even the later writers of the New Testament denounce their doctrinal opponents in unbridled terms. They call each other dogs, sorcerers, unclean, false teachers, bringers in of damnable heresies, natural brute beasts, and such terms common to the *odium theologium*. During two centuries the energy of the church was expended in the attempt to elaborate a perfect creed and compel its acceptance. It succeeded at last only by calling the emperor to the aid of a busy and intolerant minority, and drove out the majority by the sword. Ever since, through the Christian ages, these controversies have continued. On account of them each group has separated from, and denounced, the others. Each

makes its doctrinal shibboleths the test of truth and the condition of ecclesiastical citizenship. All this time the notion has prevailed that there is an irreducible minimum of necessary and unchangeable doctrinal propositions which, unless one holds and avows, he must be held an alien from the household of faith. In a word, faith has been changed from an attitude of the soul to "The Faith" which is a set of propositions addressed to the understanding.

I asked myself, Are any or all of these really necessary to being a Christian? If not, is their acceptance an essential qualification for the ministry? Here I was confronted by the ugly consideration that whether they are or not I had formally and solemnly declared my acceptance of them at my ordination. I had done so in good faith. How far and in what manner was that obligation still binding? As I faced the situation, it seemed to me to stand thus—when I was baptized my sponsors had been asked, "Do you believe all the articles of the Christian faith as they are contained in the Apostles' Creed?" and they had answered, "I do." In youth, at my confirmation, I had been asked, "Do you ratify and confirm the vows which you made or which your sponsors made in your name at baptism?" and I had replied, "I do." At ordination I had been asked, "Are you persuaded that the Holy Scripture contains all doctrine necessary to to salvation through Jesus Christ?" and again I had replied, "I do." Here then was the sum and substance of my obligation so far as belief was concerned. But over and above that I realized that I had tacitly committed myself in general to the beliefs and traditions of the church of my ministry. Now that I had come to see that many of these beliefs were of no practical consequence, and that some of them were false, what was I to do? I

had reached my convictions slowly and reluctantly after study and reflection during forty years. At the forum of conscience the pledges made for me by my sponsors at baptism had little weight. It would be hard to imagine anything more preposterous than this sponsorship. To solemnly promise for a baby that it will, during its life, believe a set of the most remote and transcendental dogmas is a solemn foolery at which honest men ought to revolt. Such promises do not have and ought not have any consideration by the child grown to manhood. The vows made in youth weighed little more. On that occasion the boy recks little of the intellectual obligations which he undertakes. It is the stir of his spiritual emotions and his wakened determination to lead a sober, righteous life which absorb his whole interest. As to my ordination declaration that I believed the Scriptures to contain all doctrines necessary to salvation, I still believe that they do—and a great many things that are not necessary.

But the real difficulty lay outside my own conscience. How can one convince the church and the common-sensible world that he could honorably be a minister in a church, some of whose fundamental beliefs he denied? To do this it is essential to make clear that he has no personal advantage to gain thereby, no livelihood at stake, no professional honors, no indebtedness for benefits received. In my case all this was true. It would have been immeasurably easier to quietly withdraw. Long reflection convinced me, however, that this would not be the right course to follow, neither honorable to myself nor advantageous to the church.

The religious life cannot be lived alone. While it is the most intimately personal thing it is also the most social. No one can be a Christian by himself. Failure to comprehend this is the besetting weakness of Protes-

tantism. It makes membership in the church an arbitrary duty instead of a natural necessity. The church is not a militant army, or a city of refuge, or an ark of safety; it is the home of the solitary. For this reason its door must be open to all. The only prerequisite is the wish to join. Neither a sound belief nor a measurably faultless life are the conditions of admission. "Whosoever will, let him come." The yearning for spiritual companionship is the credential. Whether it be a Thomas who believes too little or a Peter who believes too much, a repentant Magdalen, a crooked tax-collector, or an ignorant Samaritan woman, the door is open to all. But is there to be no discipline, no bar against the unworthy, no ejection of the unfit and the disobedient? Can any society exist on such terms? The reply is, it does exist. "Wilt thou that we go and gather up the tares? Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares ye root up the wheat also. Let both grow together till the harvest." Paul's judgment in the case, that an offender should be treated as a heathen man and a publican, that the Christian must not so much as eat with him, is the judgment of a Jew. He spoke instinctively in the spirit of the arrogant and exclusive sect in which he had been reared. It was not the judgment of Christ.

There are two irreconcilable conceptions of the church. According to the one, it is a voluntary organization, a club, an association which fixes its own condition of admission, makes its own regulations, admits or rejects, and that, having been once admitted, one cannot retain his membership honorably if he disagrees with its rules.

According to the other, it is a State into which one is born with the right of citizenship. Indeed the analogy of the state is almost complete. One's citizenship is not conditioned by his beliefs. As a citizen of a republic he

may believe in socialism or in monarchy, he may believe that many things which the state allows are wrong and that things which it prohibits are innocent. He may be a pacifist in a time of war, he may believe that the policy of the state at any given time is foolish or dangerous or wicked, and may say so. For this he will pay the penalty of unpopularity, but he will not be deprived of his citizenship or of his office if he hold one. In fine, one's political creed has nothing to do with his citizenship. If the church be conceived to be, as it is, a state into which one is born or enters at will, his membership is held by the same tenure. The moment the position is assumed that the church may demand subscription to a creed the difficulty shows itself. What creed? Who shall set it forth? By what authority? What authority, if any, can change or modify it? Can the pope and council add the article of the Immaculate Conception? And if not, why not? Is there any limit beyond which the church would be acting *ultra vires* in adding new articles?

To escape this difficulty the ecclesiastically minded turn fondly to the Vincentian rule, *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.* "Whatever has been believed always and everywhere and by everybody." Such a creed would have a show of moral obligation if only there were such a thing. "Everybody is wiser than anybody." It is a mere dialectic figment to which no reality ever did, or ever can, correspond. It cannot be applied to any article of the Catholic creeds.

Another equally impracticable theory is the binding authority of general councils, the assumption that at some time or times in the past the whole Christian Society met in formal assembly and agreed upon a creed to be thereafter binding upon every member. But there has never been a general council. What of Nice? Has the

creed which bears that name no such prescription? Every tyro in church history should know better. A group of ignorant and turbulent bishops, arbitrarily selected by a pagan emperor for political purposes, there issued a creed which a majority of its members disbelieved and which was rejected by the great body of the contemporary church, and was imposed upon it only by the emperor's sword. Apart from its own intrinsic truth it can have no other authority.

But if the church be not organized about a creed, what then is its principle of coherence? One has only to open his eyes to see that while the Church Universal has always been rent and divided over doctrines it still is a church universal. Some community of instinct has always drawn Christian to Christian and marked them off from the rest of humanity. In this fact should be found the clew to the path which the searchers for church unity should follow. Such a unity is to be found neither in "Faith" or "Order." The dream of an ecumenical Ecclesia "moving like a mighty army," unified and disciplined, obedient to a common will and command, is idle and would be mischievous if realized. Such an *imperium in imperio* would not long be tolerated in a free society. Even now, in its smaller divisions, it is but too ready to "take Jesus by force and make him a king." When they fail to persuade men to temperance they call in Cæsar's legions to prohibit drink; when they find their Sabbath stillness disturbed by the world's noise they call upon the police to maintain silence; when they dislike the teaching of the common schools they demand a share of the state's treasure to maintain their own. If there were in the land one unified church, and all Christians regimented within it, it would not long keep in mind the distinction between the things that are God's and the things that are Cæsar's. May it

be that the impossibility of agreement in belief is the natural safeguard against a church which would imperil the state? In any case the principle of coherence is not its acceptance of a common creed. No matter what or how many articles it might contain it will always be too much for some and too little for others who profess and call themselves Christians.

The *differentia* of Christianity is a certain ideal of life, and nothing else is. This ideal is incapable of precise definition just because it is an ideal. But it is easily recognized. It is at once complex and simple. It is so exalted that none may attain to it, and so easy that any one may follow it. Though it always eludes it always beckons. It consists essentially of a certain conception of personal purity; of good will toward one's fellows; of a sense of security in God's universe; of willingness to be sacrificed, if need be, for truth and for one's fellow men. This ideal is usually referred to the historic Jesus as its prototype and ensample. How far this can be justified by the facts may be questioned. It was existent in the world before him, and we know too little about him to be sure. But whether the ideal comes originally from him, or whether it has been slowly built up and fitted upon him, the characteristic kind of life for which the church stands now gathers itself about the person of "the Christ." The Christ of human consciousness is not simply an historical personage for us any more than it was for Paul, but the accumulated ideals of the race. His completeness is not in the past but in the future.

To further this ideal, to conserve its gains, to proclaim it to the world is the charge to the church and the function of the minister.

CHAPTER XVIII

LIFE IN THE CHURCH

In every association of men it is inevitable that each individual must forego a certain amount of liberty in the interest of the society. The more deeply he feels the importance of that object the more willingly he subordinates his own preferences. He does so up to the point where surrender would be dishonest or dishonorable. The higher churchman he is the more willingly he makes this surrender. My problem was twofold: Could I, with my convictions, continue to exercise my ministry with any tolerable degree of comfort? and could the Church tolerate me with my convictions avowed?

I had to confess that many things involved in my ministry were distasteful in the highest degree. I have already spoken of the absurdity of the Baptismal Office. Could I be a party to what seemed to me the solemn farce of asking sponsors to pledge for an infant that he would all his life believe the Apostle's Creed? Besides that, there were statements in the Office which no intelligent man can believe after he once realizes their meaning,—that "all men are conceived and born in sin"; that "God saved Noah and his family in the ark from perishing by water"; that the miraculous transit was "intended to figure holy baptism"; that by means of baptism the child is regenerate. In the Office for the Visitation of the Sick is the bald assertion that sickness, pain, and misfortune are sent by God for Chastisement. In the Office of Holy Communion

is the declaration of salvation by substitution, that "Jesus Christ by his death upon the cross made there by his one oblation of himself once offered a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the world." In every service it was my duty to lead the people in the recitation of the Creed. If I followed the regulations I must at every service read portions from the Old Testament, portions some of which were morally objectionable and most of them unintelligible. Could I honestly do and say such things? Then why not resign and thus escape all these painful necessities?

If the church were a club this course would be obvious and natural. But the relation of priest and church is not to be disposed of so lightly. At my ordination I had been asked, "Do you think in your heart that you are truly called according to the will of God and according to the canons of this church to the order and ministry of the priesthood?" I answered that I did think so. I think so yet. I have proved it by more than fifty years of a not unsuccessful ministry. To abandon it, to thus confess that I had been all the years like one of the sons of Eli, this I could not do. If I had found the house too strait to live in comfortably I must just live in it uncomfortably. But all things considered, was this course open to me? The main function of the ministry was as open to me as it ever had been,—to proclaim the Christ as the ideal of life, to persuade men of this ideal, to admit them to his society by the age-long initiatory rite, to celebrate with them life in the savior-god in symbols of bread and wine. The obstacle was that the church in which I served had chosen to connect these duties with certain dogmatic formularies which, according to the letter of them, I did not believe to be true.

A good many years ago Mr. Balfour in his "Founda-

tions of Belief" pointed out a phenomenon which concerns the matter in hand. A creed, he says, when first framed and promulgated is an honest, and so far as words will serve, a scientific statement of truth. As such, it is received and cherished. But as time goes on, words change their connotation, habits of thought are modified, definitions which were clear and sharp become blurred and obliterated. But loyalty to the creed does not cease on that account. Its function changes, however. Instead of being an intelligent statement of truth, it becomes a banner, a flag, a symbol. Its terms are not considered in their literal meaning, but only the symbol as a whole. Its terms may not be true but the truth is represented by it. It is recited in public worship as though it were in an ancient and unknown tongue. And in point of fact it is so. When the fiery Poles in their cathedral at Cracow were accustomed to recite it with swords brandished aloft they were not expressing theological truth but vowing loyal devotion. This I found to be the attitude of Christian people generally toward doctrinal creeds and formularies. Indeed, the less they understood them the more ardently they maintained them. For them they are as ancient coins whose superscriptions have been worn and partly obliterated by the hands of the generations through which they have passed, but the metal itself is precious.

I discovered that I had been weighing too scrupulously the *terms* in which the church has expressed her thought. What though she has wrapped Baptism around with archaic legend and obsolete theology there always remained the central truth that as the body is cleansed by the washing of water so the soul must needs be cleansed by some stream which can have its source only in the Spirit of God.

Even though the Eucharist be not an institution originally founded by Jesus, its central idea is eternally true

and has been felt and commemorated by many peoples through many millenniums. As the body is nourished and sustained by the fruits of the earth and invigorated by the juice of the grape, so the soul is united to God in a fashion as intimate as by eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Even if the phraseology of the sacrament be a survival from Mithraic rite and Hebrew sacrifice and Egyptian speculation, these are but borrowed vestments to adorn the Christian priest. For him they may be but poorly fashioned garments for the body of Christ in whom he finds eternal truth. Ought the Christian to feel his Holy Communion any the less holy or any the less a communion or any the less a memorial of his own Master because it has been shared by myriads before the time of Tiberius? Should the fact not make him feel all the more surely embarked upon that great stream of religion which flows through all the ages?

Thus my sense of oppression by the bondage of the letter was relieved and I could minister with a mind at ease. Men have always and everywhere tried to state in words the truth about God, and the language has always been inadequate and often faulty. Why should I not use the terms provided for me by the church? I have continued to use them and will continue to do so during the few remaining years of my ministry and my life. But sadness oppresses me as I see the church which I love clogged and overloaded by the burdens which she so needlessly bears.

The unanimous testimony of those who observed the religious side of our American youth in the Great War showed that they have a religion which is real though inarticulate. It is the working religion of all good men everywhere and in all times. But they are indifferent to the church and they neither know nor care anything

about the dogmas she insists upon. In this they are at one with the educated men and women from the universities and the colleges, as well as with the multitude of working men. The reason commonly given why this latter class holds aloof, because they think the church to be allied with capitalism, is not the true one. It would not weigh for a moment if they could feel at home in the Protestant churches otherwise. They have a religion whose foundation is Brotherhood, and that is the foundation of the religion of Christ. They have shown that they know well the necessity and power of organization and the futility of individual action. They would be as ready to organize in the religious sphere as in the economic. They know that the church wants them. But they feel that they would not feel at home in her house. This is not from fear of social discomfort there. It is because the things they find there do not appeal to them. The language is unintelligible, the forms and rites are meaningless, the subjects discussed seem to them to have no relation to actual life.

In a word, the educated and the practical world are both alike steadily drawing apart from the church. I have watched this movement for fifty years. Can anything be done to reverse it or to turn it in a different direction? First of all, the church must open her eyes and look. But she must look at things as they are to-day, not as they were in the fourth century or the twelfth or the eighteenth. She should no longer rest in a fool's paradise. Her task will not be an easy one. The practical steps can only be taken one by one as they may appear.

But the fundamental principle is that the church's door must be wide open and a welcome offered to every one who wishes to enter and wishes to live his life following the Christian Ideal, and upon no other condition expressed or implied.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GOAL

My fifty years' ministry has been spent in the church which is by tradition and inheritance the church of the English-speaking race. Once it included that whole race. Now it stands as one among the smallest of a dozen churches speaking the same tongue. Altogether they include in their membership little more than half of the population. The other half would probably call themselves "Christians" but they live outside the churches.

Is there any likelihood of the Episcopal church coming to terms with the others?

Is there any likelihood of them all together recovering the multitude outside?

Is there any influence or tendency discernible which is moulding or leading them all?

One who has lived within them for fifty years can see the general line of movement which they have all followed. In this movement the Episcopal Church has been in advance, but all have moved in the same direction. That motion has been steadily toward what may justly be called *Sacramentalism.* By that I mean devotion expressed in symbolic act as distinguished from inward experience whether of the understanding or the emotions. Within the Episcopal Church the transformation has been most marked. Its manners of fifty years ago and of today would scarcely recognize each other. Then it was "Protestant," today

it is not. The essence of Protestantism is that salvation is a transaction between the individual soul and God. From this central idea all its doctrine and practice emerges. Its theology concerns itself with the nature of God. Its psychology deals with the stages and phases of the individual transaction. It has no place, in any real sense, for Sacraments. They are surplussage. They are rather an embarrassing sacred tradition, observed but not greatly valued. Two things and two things only are held supreme, a right belief and a right inward experience. This, with certain modifications, was the attitude of the Church of England and her daughter in America, in common with all Protestant churches.

But during nearly a century all the churches of the western hemisphere have been moving as though attracted by some unseen body in the religious galaxy. Rome has led the way. Her sodalities of the Blessed Sacrament, her cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the like are the result of a newly felt attraction. The Church of England followed after. Her interest traveled from the pulpit to the altar. The Sacraments which had been but vaguely conceived and but formally observed became meticuously defined and their celebration attended with ever deepening reverence and compassed about with observances. Now they stand in the forefront. History, doctrine and discipline revolve about them. Their ritual becomes more and more ornate. The personal religious life becomes more and more dependent upon them. The Protestant element in the church is recalcitrant and deplores the tendency. It strives to bring the church back again to the Protestant attitude. It strives in vain. Like all human movements it is not the result of conspiracy or even of conscious intent but of an unseen force which no man can estimate or withstand. The

whole religious world is within the sweep of this attraction. The most Protestant of churches have adorned their sanctuaries, elaborated their services, devised rituals, deepened their outward expressions of reverence. All alike they find themselves in the same procession, only at different distances from the front. The officially commissioned minister is resuming the place which the irresponsible revivalists for a time usurped. Worship takes the place of exhortation. The so-called science of theology is held in less respect. Whither does it all tend?

It would seem that religion is again finding its place in that line of movement which it has followed through all the ages. Out of the dumb experience of pain men have looked about, above and beneath for relief of explanation. They have found it in the conception that God himself is bound up together with them in the same necessity and helplessness. The center of religion is the idea of a *Suffering God.* Christianity long ago seized upon this idea and, without warrant, claimed it as its exclusive possession, located it in time and space, gave it a date, a locality, circumstance, called God by the name of a Man, and ignored or denied all the experiences of the race.

But through Christianity's whole course flows unsuspected the old stream of human experience and aspiration. In mystic union with the dying and reviving Saviour-God is the soul's life. For many the sense of appropriation is satisfied by an intellectual comprehension. But for the multitude satisfaction comes best through sacrificial symbol, "eating his flesh and drinking his blood." Probably its most sufficient expression is to be found in the Roman Mass. The figment of Transubstantiation is of little consequence. That is only a superficial attempt to rationalize an instinct. All doctrines of Sacraments fail to express

this instinct. It is outside of reason because life itself is beyond explanation.

The goal to which religion, therefore, would seem to be moving is a Church of the Saviour-God, freed from bondage to history, untrammeled by Scripture, unharassed by definitions, open without question to all who "'neath life's crushing load" would find solace for their body and soul in symbolic union with the spirit and body of the broken God, "the promise of all religions, the cry which makes all creeds one."

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